

*Women and Rugby League: Gender, Class and  
Community in the North of England,  
1880-1970*

by

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## Abstract

This thesis is a history of women's involvement in rugby league between 1880 and 1970. It shows that whilst women were traditionally excluded from playing rugby league, they were involved in the game, as supporters, volunteers and organisers. Women were also the mothers, wives, sisters or daughters of men who played or administered rugby, and were thus involved in the sport at the most personal level, providing a reservoir of unpaid labour to support their menfolk, but also suffering when injury or retirement from rugby reduced the family income. The thesis demonstrates that women have been an integral part of rugby league from its earliest days as a spectator sport in the north of England.

This research explores how women found the space to assert their right to a role within rugby league and to derive their own enjoyment from it. It argues that women's relationship with the sport was exceedingly complex and often appeared to be contradictory. Women volunteers were pushed into traditional supportive roles in their clubs yet used their position to exert influence and some power over those clubs. Working-class women were able to mark out areas of authority in their families and communities by working independently within rugby league's patriarchal framework.

This thesis asks whether their involvement in rugby league reflects women's social, economic and political status in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and, by exploring women's lived experiences and foregrounding overlooked measures of success, also reassesses the questions asked by historians of sport. Feminist in its methodology, the thesis also strives for intersectionality in terms of class and other formative relationships, such as age, geography, economy and cultural identity. It shows the depth of experiences of women involved in rugby league and offers a new way of understanding how women engaged with sport.



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## Introduction

‘There is no good answer to being a woman; the art may instead lie in how we refuse the question’

~ Rebecca Solnit.<sup>1</sup>

Women’s lives are often expected to fit one narrative line, as if there is only one way that any woman can be happy. As children we are taught that solitary women are dangerous; they may want to push you in an oven and eat you all up, or turn you into a mouse using poisoned chocolate. We are told that only your biological mother can love you, and that if your father remarries it is impossible for your step-mother to like you, let alone love you and care for you, accepting you as their own. That these characters are there as didactic tools to help children learn about the unfairness humanity insists on creating is the familiar excuse for centuries of “villainous” women. But these figures stay with us all our lives. The wicked stepmother, the wicked witch, the two are interchangeable. The “best” women are those who are pretty, demure, and show a little pluck, but not too much. Too much pluck, too much independence of spirit, might get you gobbled up by a wolf. The best women are controlled, contained, and heterosexual, and this makes them just right for the handsome prince. Because every girl wants a handsome prince, don’t they?

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<sup>1</sup> Rebecca Solnit. 2015. ‘The Mother of all Questions’ in *Harper’s Magazine*, October Issue, pp.5-7. Available: <http://harpers.org/archive/2015/10/the-mother-of-all-questions/> [Accessed: 23 April, 2016].

It was International Women's Day 2012, when on live television ex-Great Britain player and Sky Sports broadcaster Mike Stephenson answered the question as to why rugby league was so popular with women, with the following comment:

The reason I think it's so popular is... the thighs. The men's thighs. I ask a lot of the women, I say, "why?", y'know, ah, to see those guys – and let's face it, to see those wonderful athletes going down the field and the rippling thighs going and you think, hmm, they've got a point.<sup>2</sup>

Stephenson accuses women of enjoying rugby league in a scopophilic way, deriving pleasure from looking at the players' athletic bodies. Such observation is an expression of sexuality, a moral corruption amongst women. Under the heterosexual female gaze, sport loses its masculine, moral authority and is degraded into an ignoble spectacle that belongs in the realm of entertainment. For Mike Stephenson, rugby league players are the handsome princes that every woman desires. Access and acceptance are not synonymous, and the hypocrisy of sport is epitomised by its masculine culture. To operate within the manly arena of rugby league, women have to operate within the masculine framework that the sport dictates.

'A man's game for all the family' – this was the advertising slogan used to promote rugby league by its governing body, the Rugby Football League, in the 1980s.<sup>3</sup> Although seen by the sport's administrators as a clever marketing ploy to promote the sport's toughness whilst emphasising its wholesome, family appeal, the slogan laid bare the game's gendered, physically brutal, masculine nature. In both codes of rugby, rugby

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<sup>2</sup> Victoria Dawson, *International Women's Day 2012 Rugby League on Sky Sports News*. 14 April, 2013 [Video]. Available online: <https://youtu.be/wAPuISBug-4> [Accessed: 14 April, 2013].

<sup>3</sup> Tony Collins, *Rugby League in Twentieth Century Britain: A Social and Cultural History*, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006), p.154.

league and rugby union, the sport is lauded by its followers as the most masculine of sports. Rugby league has its base in the northern, working-class, industrial English towns, and it is perhaps a reflection of its working culture that it often pits itself as the more masculine of the two rugbies, its fans often casting doubt on the masculinity of its overwhelmingly middle-class cousin.

But what of the position of women in this hyper-masculine rugby league world? As this thesis will demonstrate, until the 1980s women have traditionally been excluded from playing the sport and have rarely been acknowledged in administrative or other roles. 'We have no dealings with women here', said the prominent Yorkshire rugby administrator, the Reverend Frank Marshall, in 1889, and this was essentially the position of the sport for almost the next century.<sup>4</sup> Yet despite this hostility, women were involved in the game, as supporters, volunteers and organisers. Moreover, whether they liked it or not, women who were the mothers, wives, sisters or daughters of those men who played or administered rugby were involved in the sport at the most personal level, providing both a reservoir of unpaid labour to support their menfolk and also suffering when injury or retirement from rugby reduced the family income. Regardless of whether they played the sport, off the field women have been an integral part of rugby league from its earliest days as a spectator sport in the north of England.

### A brief history of rugby league

Organised rugby matches were first played in the north in the 1850s, by teams of former pupils of England's elite public schools. By the 1860s rugby clubs were being

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<sup>4</sup> *The Yorkshireman*, 12 December, 1889, p.7.

formed across the north of England and, as with soccer, by the end of the late 1870s rugby had become a mass spectator sport, thanks to the rise in working-class living standards earlier in the decade, the introduction of Saturday half-day working in 1874 and the growing world of commercial leisure. This was also accompanied by an influx of working-class players, so much so that by the mid-1880s they had come to dominate the sport in Lancashire and Yorkshire, giving cause for concern among the leaders of the sport's governing body, the Rugby Football Union. To curb the influence of these proletarian players, the Rugby Football Union forbade payment to players, declaring the sport to be completely amateur. This caused huge resentment among clubs in the north, who responded with a campaign to allow "broken-time payments" to be made to players who were forced to take time off from work to play the game.<sup>5</sup>

The Rugby Football Union refused to compromise and in 1895 rugby split in two, when the leading northern clubs resigned from the Rugby Football Union and created the Northern Rugby Football Union, which in 1922 would change its name to the Rugby Football League. Within a few years almost all rugby clubs in industrial Lancashire and Yorkshire, together with those in Cumbria, had joined the new organisation, which legalised payments to players, and changed the rules of the game to make it faster and more exciting (for example by reducing teams from fifteen to thirteen players, removing the line-out and reducing the number of scrums). Although professionalism was legalised, few players ever earned enough from the sport to abandon their regular employment,

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<sup>5</sup> The definitive account is Tony Collins, *Rugby's Great Split*, (Abingdon: Routledge, [1998] 2006).

which meant that players were always a part of the working-class communities that supported the clubs.

Rugby league, as the new form of rugby quickly became known, was concentrated in the mining and mill towns of the north and rapidly shed rugby's earlier social connections to the privately-educated and professional classes. It became seen, by supporters and non-supporters alike, as a "working-class sport", played and watched by the industrial working classes. It also became seen as an exemplar of northern working-class self-confidence; by the early 1900s the phrase "'T' best int' Northern Union'" was widely used in Lancashire and Yorkshire to signify that something was the best that could be found anywhere, reflecting the sport's self-belief that its players were the best rugby players anywhere in the world.

Unsurprisingly for a sport so closely linked to its communities, its fortunes fluctuated in line with the fortunes of the economy and society of the north of England. During the depression years between the wars, it struggled for survival. Clubs went bankrupt and supporters banded together to keep their clubs afloat. Its stock rose immeasurably in the years after World War Two, when it was watched by hugely increased crowds, but by the 1960s de-industrialisation and the collapse of the traditional industries that had provided employment for players and spectators deeply damaged the sport, and attendances collapsed. They would only recover in the late 1970s when sport of all forms embraced commercial sponsorship. Yet, despite the deep-going economic



and social changes that had taken place in the north of England since the late Victorian era, the social roots and self-image of the sport has remained largely unchanged.<sup>6</sup>

## Women and the history of sport

Over the past thirty years or so there has been a greater academic interest in the history of women's involvement in sport. Although there had been literature published on the history of female physical recreation in the context of educational reforms in the nineteenth century, such as Sheila Fletcher's *Women First: The Female Tradition in English Physical Education 1880-1980*, the first serious academic work on women's sport in general was Kathleen McCrone's *Sport and the Physical Emancipation of English Women, 1870-1914* (1988), which sought to explore the development of women's sporting experience in the context of the social history of the late Victorian and Edwardian eras. McCrone was followed, and perhaps unfortunately overshadowed by Patricia Vertinsky's *The Eternally Wounded Woman: Doctors, Women and Exercise in the Late Nineteenth Century* (1990) and Jennifer Hargreaves' largely sociological study *Sporting Females: Critical Issues in the History and Sociology of Women's Sports* four years later. Since then, the field has grown steadily.<sup>7</sup>

Jean Williams' *A Game for Rough Girls* (2003) looked at the history of women and football, marking the start of a considerable and still expanding literature on women's

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<sup>6</sup> For a broad outline of the history of rugby league since the 1895 split, see Tony Collins, *Rugby League in Twentieth Century Britain: A Social and Cultural History*, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006).

<sup>7</sup> Sheila Fletcher, *Women First: The Female Tradition in English Physical Education, 1880-1980*, (London: Athlone Press, 1984); Kathleen McCrone, *Sport and the Physical Emancipation of English Women, 1870-1914*, (London: Routledge, 1988); Patricia Vertinsky, *The Eternally Wounded Woman: Doctors, Women and Exercise in the Late Nineteenth Century*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989); Jennifer Hargreaves, *Sporting Females: Critical Issues in the History and Sociology of Women's Sports*, (London: Routledge, 1994).

football history. Fiona Skillen's *Women, Sport and Modernity in Interwar Britain* (2013) explored young women's sporting activities predominantly in the microcosm of inter-war central Scotland. An example of how far the study of women's sports history had come could be seen in the fact that in 2015 the *Women's History Review* published a special issue on the subject comprising articles that sought to offer an 'adequate understanding of the kinesthetic experiences of girls and women in particular times, places and spaces'.<sup>8</sup>

What is striking about these works is that they are purely concerned with the playing of sport. Partly due to the backgrounds of the researchers, who were often former physical education teachers or enthusiastic players themselves, but also due to obvious visibility of participation in games, the focus of research into women's sport has almost completely neglected female involvement in the many other, non-playing, aspects of sport. One of the few works to go against this trend is Robert Lewis's 2009 article "'Our Lady Specialists at Pikes Lane": Female Spectators in Early English Professional Football, 1880-1914', which deals with women football fans in the Blackburn area and remains the only historical account of women football spectators.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, this emphasis on playing sport not only means that these historians have ignored huge swathes of women's involvement in sport but also underestimates the complexity of the issues

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<sup>8</sup> Carol Osborne and Fiona Skillen, 'Women in Sport', *Women's History Review*, Vol. 24, Nº 5 (2015), p.655. Williams' most recent work, *A Contemporary History of Women's Sport* (Abingdon, Routledge, 2014) continues this trend by furnishing an exhaustive list of female participants in a wide range of sports but does not include either version of rugby.

<sup>9</sup> Rob Lewis "'Our Lady Specialists at Pikes Lane": Female Spectators in Early English Professional Football, 1880-1914' *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, Vol. 26, Nº 15 (2009), pp.2161–2181. For a contemporary account, see Stacey Pope's PhD thesis, *Female Fandom in an English 'Sports City': A Sociological Study of Female Spectating and Consumption around Sport*, (University of Leicester, 2010).

facing women as they struggle for equality in society - simply having large numbers of women playing sport does not affect the fundamental oppression that women suffer.

The problems with this approach can also be seen in the latest works on women's footballing activities in the English-speaking world during and immediately after World War One. Recent research has discovered an upsurge in women's involvement in soccer, rugby league, rugby union and Australian Rules football during World War One and its aftermath in Britain, Australia and New Zealand.<sup>10</sup> Whilst this research has revealed previously unknown or forgotten details about women's participation in the various codes of football, there has been little or no attempt to relate these developments to the wider issues facing women during this period, or to understand how women's new-found but short-lived sporting activity reflected the shifting sands of societal gender norms in a period of great upheaval in society.

The one major exception in the field to this focus on women playing sport is Catriona Parratt's *More Than Mere Amusement: Working-Class Women's Leisure in England, 1750-1914* (2001). Placing class at the centre of her analysis, Parratt explored the ebbs and flows of women's involvement in leisure activities, including sport, in the context of women's changing economic and social position as Britain was transformed

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<sup>10</sup> See Jean Williams and Rob Hess (eds) 'Women, Football and History: International Perspectives', a special issue of *International Journal of the History of Sport*, Vol. 32, No 18 (2015); Katherine Haines, 'The 1921 Peak and Turning Point in Women's Football History: An Australasian, Cross-Code Perspective', *International Journal of the History of Sport*, Vol. 33, No 8 (2016), pp.828-46; Peter Burke, 'Patriot Games: Women's Football During the First World War in Australia', *Football Studies* Vol. 8, No 2 (2005), pp.5-19; Charles Little, "'What a Freak-Show They Made!': Women's Rugby League in 1920s Sydney', *Football Studies*, Vol. 4, No 2 (2000), pp.25-40; Jennifer Curtin, 'More on Male-Gazing: Reflections of Female Fans of Rugby Union in New Zealand, 1870-1920', *International Journal of the History of Sport*, Vol. 32, No 18 (2015), pp.2123-34; Barbara Cox, 'The Rise and Fall of "The Girl Footballer" in New Zealand in 1921', *International Journal of the History of Sport*, Vol. 29, No 3 (2012), pp.444-71.

from a predominantly rural economy to a factory-based industrial society. At the core of this analysis was an understanding that women's involvement in leisure was constrained and conditioned by what Parratt described as 'the double burden of domestic and wage labour [and] the sexual division of labour in the family'. Equally as important, Parratt was keen to stress the importance of women's agency, arguing that 'despite operating within a matrix of very real limits and limitations, working women were able to create spheres of pleasure for themselves'.<sup>11</sup>

Just as importantly, Parratt's focus is on working-class women. With the partial exception of the women's soccer boom of 1917-1921, almost all of the aforementioned books focus on middle-class women's sporting activity. Tellingly, the section on women's sport in Richard Holt's seminal *Sport and the British* is titled 'Female Sport and Suburbia'.<sup>12</sup> Partly this is due to visibility; as in all other walks of life, the activities of the middle- and upper-classes attract more attention and are better documented than those of the working classes of either gender, but it is also due to the fact that in general a purely gender-based approach has dominated the methodology of those writing about women's involvement in sport. Women's sport, and their leisure in general, has largely been abstracted from the broader gender and social histories of the period.

In contrast, Parratt's book is the only major history of women's sport that has sought to place itself firmly within a social history framework. It therefore built on the

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<sup>11</sup> Catriona Parratt, *More Than Mere Amusement: Working-Class Women's Leisure in England, 1750-1914*, (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2001), p.5.

<sup>12</sup> Richard Holt, *Sport and the British*, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1989), pp.117-34.

work of earlier social historians such as E.P. Thompson but also, and more importantly for the purposes of this thesis, stands alongside work such as Elizabeth Roberts' *A Woman's Place: An Oral History of Working Class Women 1890-1940* (and to a lesser extent her *Women's Work, 1840-1940*), Melanie Tebbutt's *Women's Talk? A Social History of Gossip in Working-Class Neighbourhoods, 1880–1960*, and Claire Langhamer's *Women's Leisure in England, 1920-1960*.<sup>13</sup> All of these monographs place class at the centre of their analysis of women's oppression whilst at the same time demonstrating how women sought to create, enlarge and even defend spaces for them in which to assert and enjoy themselves.

## Methodology

This thesis is an attempt to find “another way of telling” the story of rugby league, but primarily it is an attempt to change the narrative of *women's* involvement in rugby league.<sup>14</sup> Its noble goal is to right a wrong, to show the depth of experiences of those women involved in the sport, allowing for the assumptions people make about women having little or no involvement in the sport to change, and as such, it takes a different approach to most writing on women and sport. The sporting lens through which this thesis peers at the lives of its subjects is not its primary focus. For most of the women of which you are about to read, sport was not the all-consuming passion that ruled their existence, but it was part of their complex, multi-faceted lives. Whether they found a “good answer” to being a woman, we cannot possibly know, but it was their answer, and

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<sup>13</sup> Elizabeth Roberts, *A Woman's Place: An Oral History of Working Class Women 1890-1940* (Oxford, Wiley-Blackwell, 1995) and *Women's Work, 1840-1940* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996). Melanie Tebbutt, *Women's Talk? A Social History of Gossip in Working Class Neighbourhoods, 1880–1960* (Aldershot, Scolar Press, 1995). Claire Langhamer, *Women's Leisure in England, 1920-1960* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2000)

<sup>14</sup> Rebecca Solnit. 'The Mother of all Questions'.

their answer is what matters. For some of these women, rugby league was a large part of their whole life, but for others, the sport came and went as the women moved through the twists and turns of circumstance and priorities changed.

In the traditional worldview happiness is essentially private and selfish. Reasonable people pursue their self-interest, and when they do so successfully they are supposed to be happy. The very definition of what it means to be human is narrow, and altruism, idealism, and public life (except in the forms of fame, status, or material success) have little place on the shopping list. The idea that a life should seek meaning seldom emerges; not only are the standard activities assumed to be meaningful, they are treated as the only meaningful options.<sup>15</sup>

In most women's sports history, the participation in the playing of sport is treated as the only meaningful way in which women can engage. Emphasis is placed on being the top scorer, the record-breaker, the fastest, the highest, the most expensive, the richest. Sport is an arena constructed by men with a masculine framework, and to place importance on such participatory achievements is to engage in the masculine sporting world on men's terms. Such an approach privileges the patriarchal system of qualification as the only workable system, and women historians of women's sport strive to prove that women have been and can be just as "good" as men if they are allowed to participate in the system on equal terms with men. But in privileging this history, in measuring women's achievements within the masculine framework, they uphold the very system that has persisted in the suppression of women, be it in terms of participation, prize money, or life choices, and as a result much is missed about how women have participated in sport on their own terms, despite the masculine system.

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<sup>15</sup> Rebecca Solnit, 'The Mother of all Questions'.

Feminism 'begins with women who step outside of the ordinary; women who charge the world not to go on as it does', and in this sense this thesis is a feminist thesis, both in terms of approach and its subjects.<sup>16</sup> But as a feminist thesis about working-class women it follows Elizabeth Roberts' example and 'does not seek to investigate patriarchy or male oppression of women'.<sup>17</sup> This thesis agrees with Roberts' assertion that

The patriarchal model tends to stress the negative aspects of women's lives, and thus [...] distorts the true picture [...] It would be a great pity if the power and achievements of women, such as they were, were overlooked because of the application of a rigid model.<sup>18</sup>

The focus therefore, will be on the women's lives, their lived experiences, and their achievements. Solnit suggests that the questions we ask about people's lives are restrictive, and our measures of success ignore how spacious lives can be, how effective people's actions can be, and how far-reaching their love can be.<sup>19</sup> This thesis asks the broad question of whether women's involvement in rugby league reflects what we know of women's social, economic and political situations in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, but also reassesses the questions asked by historians of sport by exploring women's lived experiences and attempting to foreground Solnit's overlooked measures of success.

But as Tebbutt has highlighted, working-class neighbourhoods between the 1880s and 1950s were self-enclosed and introspective in nature, 'characterised by distinct

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<sup>16</sup> Hilary M. Schor, 'Gender Politics and Women's Rights' in *A Companion to the Victorian Novel*, (eds.) Patrick Brantlinger and William B. Thesing, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Limited, 2002), p.176.

<sup>17</sup> Elizabeth Roberts, *A Woman's Place: An Oral History of Working-Class Women 1890-1940*, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984), p.2.

<sup>18</sup> Elizabeth Roberts, *A Woman's Place*, p.2-3.

<sup>19</sup> Rebecca Solnit, 'The Mother of all Questions'.

cultural forms and significant degrees of gender segregation'.<sup>20</sup> Therefore, insofar as possible, whilst this thesis is feminist in nature it strives for intersectionality in terms of class, and shows women's lives in the context of other formative relationships, such as age, geography and economy.<sup>21</sup> Motherhood is also discussed in terms of how it shapes the lives of women and how they become actors in the sport, but this thesis follows Solnit's thinking in that

People lock onto motherhood as a key to feminine identity in part from the belief that children are the best way to fulfil your capacity to love [...] but there are so many things to love besides one's own offspring, so many things that need love, so much other work love has to do in the world.<sup>22</sup>

Some of the histories in this thesis show that women's love has been "far-reaching" and taken different forms within rugby league, whether it be nurturing immediate family, players, children, or whole communities. Some women's rugby league experiences were instigated by their children, some were not, and some remained child-free, but all of these women showed an equal capacity to extend their love beyond themselves.

Nevertheless, these women's actions can often be described in the terms of Christina Lupton as 'ways of tending to the world that are less easily validated than parenting, but which are just as fundamentally necessary for children [and communities] to flourish'.<sup>23</sup>

Rugby's aggressive opposition to femininity and to effeminacy in men has meant that women have had to struggle for acceptance in a sport that, to a large extent, owed

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<sup>20</sup> Melanie Tebbutt, *Women's Talk?: A Social History of 'Gossip' in Working-Class Neighbourhoods, 1880-1960*, (Aldershot: Scholar Press, 1995), p.2.

<sup>21</sup> Judy Giles, *Women, Identity and Private Life in Britain, 1900-1950*, (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1995), p.11.

<sup>22</sup> Rebecca Solnit, 'The Mother of all Questions'.

<sup>23</sup> Christina Lupton, 2015. 'After Mother's Day', *Avidly*. Available: <http://avidly.lareviewofbooks.org/2015/05/11/after-mothers-day/> [Accessed 23 April, 2016].



its existence to the creation of a “male-only space” in sport. Thomas Hughes’ novel *Tom Brown’s School Days* (1857) played a crucial role in creating much of rugby’s popularity in the mid-nineteenth century, and demonstrates how the sport became a method through which boys and young men could be toughened and inured against the dangers of effeminacy and homosexuality. Women were welcomed as decorative spectators but fiercely contested when they dared express an opinion on the game. Women were forbidden from playing but used by commercial entrepreneurs in the 1880s and 1890s to provide semi-salacious entertainment. In addition, women were eventually accepted as volunteers at clubs (and later even as administrators) but within the strictly circumscribed limits of the sport’s existing masculine structure.

However, even within such tightly-defined limits, women still found the space to assert their right to play a role within the sport and to derive their own enjoyment from it. They quietly defied those men who sought to exclude or condemn them and found methods of asserting their own agency. Their relationship with the sport was therefore exceedingly complex and often appeared to be contradictory. Women volunteers were pushed into traditional supportive roles in their clubs yet often used their position to exert influence and some power over those clubs. In this they could be said to be using the social skills of many working-class women, who were able to mark out areas of authority and leadership in their families and communities by working against the grain of expectations. These women acted independently, but did so within an externally-imposed patriarchal framework.

The concept of “leisure” as opposed to “work” is not an appropriate definition in the study of women’s history, and the same is true for this study. Many of the women discussed here made active choices to spend their time away from paid employment and family obligations “working” for their individual rugby league causes. Like Langhamer, this thesis explores the ‘fluidity within which specific experiences gain definitional validity as “leisure” or “work” [...] over the course of the life cycle’.<sup>24</sup>

The concept of class is one that has been extensively debated by historians and sociologists for as long as British society has been described in class terms.<sup>25</sup> For the purposes of this thesis I have chosen to follow Selina Todd’s definition of ‘working class’, which she defines as:

composed largely of manual workers and their families – miners, dockers and steelworkers, and also domestic servants – and lower grade clerical workers like typists, secretaries, office boys and messengers. They constituted more than three-quarters of the British people until 1950, and more than half as late as 1991. Then there were the large numbers of non-manual workers - nurses, technicians and higher grade clerical workers - who chose to identify themselves as working class by virtue of their family background and because they believed that working for a living meant that they had more in common with other wage-earners than with employers or political leaders.<sup>26</sup>

Todd’s definition draws upon that of E.P. Thompson of ‘class as a social, economic, and political relationship, which arises out of shared experience forged by productive

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<sup>24</sup> Claire Langhamer, *Women’s Leisure in England, 1920-1960*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), p.2.

<sup>25</sup> For a selection of the key works and an overview of the debate, see Patrick Joyce (ed.) *Class*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

<sup>26</sup> Selina Todd, *The People: The Rise and Fall of the Working Class, 1910-2010*, (London, John Murray, 2013), pp.1-2.

relations'.<sup>27</sup> Class cannot be determined by the singular measure of occupational status, and Todd's definition has the advantage of both asserting the fundamental economic relationship at the heart of class whilst foregrounding the aspect of identifying with a class. In a society that is as concerned with class and its gradations as Britain, sporting affiliation is a major signifier of class background. Nowhere is this more apparent than in rugby, where in England rugby union is synonymous with the middle classes and rugby league with the working classes. To be a rugby league player or supporter in the twentieth century was perhaps an even greater symbol of working-class identity than being a member of a trade union. This thesis follows the notion of intersectionality between class, economics and cultural identity, exploring the period from the origins of the game to the late 1960s, when the impact of deindustrialisation and cultural shifts changed both the north of England and rugby league itself.

## Research methods

Unpacking this complexity has necessitated the use of a variety of research tools. The history of working-class women's lives is largely absent from mainstream records and as a result has demanded 'much lateral thinking' in order to seek out sources as well as build a constructive historical narrative.<sup>28</sup> Until the 1980s, rugby league was not a sport with a significant literary or historical tradition. Like many working-class cultural practices, the history and traditions of the game were (and still are) generally communicated orally. Books on the sport only began to be published in the late 1950s and despite the growth

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<sup>27</sup> Selina Todd, *Young Women, Work, and Family in England 1918-1950*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p.8

<sup>28</sup> Melanie Tebbut, *Women's Talk?*, p.6.

of academic sports history in the 1980s and 1990s the only academic works on the history of the game are those of Tony Collins.<sup>29</sup> National newspapers tended to view the sport as a marginal northern game, leaving local newspapers to provide regular, detailed coverage. Those national newspapers such as the *Daily Mirror*, which produced northern editions, have disappeared from the archival landscape due to the London-centric nature of national archives, namely The British Library, which neglected to keep them. Although the Rugby Football League has established its own archive at the University of Huddersfield, this primarily comprises minutes of committee meetings and records of administration, which have provided a small number of insights, such as on the charging policy for women spectators in the interwar years, but these are rare and episodic. As in other professional sports, the records of clubs are either non-existent or little more than accounts of decisions made.

This paucity of sources has led me to rely extensively on local newspapers, which has both great advantages and dangerous pitfalls. The fact that many local newspapers are now digitised and searchable has made possible the search for women's involvement in the game in ways that would have been impossible even a decade ago. This has allowed me to discover the names and activities of many women in different parts of the north of England whose activities in rugby league have previously disappeared into the ether. It has also allowed me to examine the shifting media narratives about gender and rugby in the broader context of the times. The traditionally close relationship between

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<sup>29</sup> Tony Collins, *Rugby's Great Split: Class, Culture and the Origins of Rugby League Football*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, (Abingdon: Routledge, [1998] 2006); *Rugby League in Twentieth Century Britain: A Social and Cultural History*, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006); *A Social History of English Rugby Union*, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2009).

the local press and the clubs also allows a glimpse the “official” attitudes to gender issues of clubs and the RFL.

But of course this reliance on newspapers also carries its own dangers. Coverage is necessarily partial, and often reliant on club officials themselves to provide stories and news. Unthinking every day, so-called “common sense” male chauvinist attitudes may mean that stories about women in the sport are consciously or unconsciously skewed or even ignored. Most importantly, newspapers necessarily mediate all news and information for commercial and many other reasons, meaning that they can only ever be viewed as a partial source. Nevertheless, for the historian seeking to explore unresearched areas, newspapers are the most important, if flawed, of all available sources from which to begin a search.

In order to overcome some of the limitations of newspaper-based research but also to try to explore the important unwritten traditions of the sport this thesis uses oral history techniques to investigate specific topics in the post-war period. As Paul Thompson has stated:

oral history is a history built around people. It thrusts life into history itself and widens its scope. It allows heroes not just from the leaders, but from the unknown majority of people.<sup>30</sup>

Given the lack of sources relating to working-class women’s lives, oral history offers an opportunity for women to speak for themselves and their own experiences. Perhaps most

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<sup>30</sup> Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978/1988), p.21.

importantly, it 'informs us about the significance of the events'.<sup>31</sup> In her essay "'Let me tell you..." Memory and the Practice of Oral History', Michal Bosworth stated that 'we historians begin with what we think we know, our curiosity then pushes us to pose relevant questions'.<sup>32</sup> The author certainly found that the people she spoke to sparked her curiosity often beyond the obvious remit of this thesis, but those questions and conversations that did arise, seemingly as tangential, were as crucial to the wider contextual understanding of the experiences of the subjects as any written source.

Oral history collation has presented the opportunity to explore such issues as the extent of the work involved in women's voluntary work for clubs in the 1940s, the motivations for women to take up and play rugby league in the 1950s, and the relationships between a female rugby coach and her male players in the 1960s. Conversely, the use of oral history methodologies has also allowed me to interrogate claims of women playing rugby league in Featherstone the early 1920s. By interviewing the original interviewer of a deceased subject then analyzing the contradictory contemporary sources, the thesis goes some way to doubly-answering the question posed by Valerie Yow in her chapter on oral history and memory: 'is there a purpose that influenced the way the narrator remembered?'.<sup>33</sup> As Yow stated:

When other oral testimonies and written documents do not corroborate the narrator's statements, we can surmise that the narrator's testimony is possibly not true historically, but we may

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<sup>31</sup> Valerie Raleigh Yow, *Recording Oral History: A Guide for the Humanities and Social Sciences*, Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015), p.26.

<sup>32</sup> Michal Bosworth, "'Let me tell you..." Memory and the Practice of Oral History' in Joan Tumblety (ed.), *Memory and History: Understanding Memory as Source and Subject*, (London: Routledge, 2013), p.20.

<sup>33</sup> Valerie Raleigh Yow, *Recording Oral History: A Guide for the Humanities and Social Sciences*, Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015), p.18.

have evidence for a different kind of truth, perhaps a psychological truth for the narrator. We can ask, what does the discrepancy between the speaker's truth and the truth of other evidence indicate?<sup>34</sup>

This thesis considers the influence of place in this example, corroborating Shelley Trower's assertion that 'oral history provides unique insights into places' but hopefully subverting the trend of 'studies sometimes treat[ing] place in a rather superficial manner'.<sup>35</sup> This case study in particular shows that a sense of place can be a pivotal factor in contextualising the discrepancies in oral and written records. In turn this thesis demonstrates that, although oral history brings its own problems of reliability and shifting memory, when conducted judiciously and appropriately contextualised with other sources, it can offer new insight into the history of not only rugby league, but sport, and history, in general.

Sixteen oral history interviews have been utilised within this thesis. Ethical clearance was given by De Montfort University in 2012 prior to any interviews taking place. Two potential ethical issues were identified: the first being that some sensitive questions may be asked regarding gender and/or discrimination as a result of gender. In order to address this concern it was agreed that informed consent would be sought from all participants before commencement of the interviews and that the option would be given to all participants to decline to answer any questions they are not comfortable with. Interviewees were given the option of confidentiality in the form of having their identity omitted from the final thesis and a space was allocated for this to be documented on the

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<sup>34</sup> Valerie Raleigh Yow, *Recording Oral History: A Guide for the Humanities and Social Sciences*, Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015), p.26.

<sup>35</sup> Shelley Trower, *Place, Writing, and Voice in Oral History*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p.2.

Oral History Recording Agreement. Interviewees were also given the right to withdraw from the project at any time. In the event that any interviewees were under the age of sixteen years old, it was a requirement that a consenting adult present for the duration of the interview. Both the subject and the adult were also required to sign the consent form.

The second issue of data security was addressed with agreement that all electronic data would be secured in password protected files, with the researcher and academic supervisor being the principle password holders. Back-up copies of interviews were made with master copies being kept securely on an external hard drive which was kept in fire-proof, lockable storage. All personal information such as addresses and telephone numbers were and will remain separate from the audio interview files in perpetuity.

All interviews were recorded with high quality settings on a Zoom H2n portable voice recorder. These sound files will be deposited in the Rugby Football League Archive within five years of the final thesis submission to De Montfort University, complying with any personal embargo requests made by the individuals being interviewed. Interviewees were given hard copies of the Invitation for Interview (appendix 1), Interviewee Information Sheet (appendix 2) and Oral History Recording Agreement (appendix 3) prior to the interview commencing. All documents were written in accordance of the guidelines set out by the Oral History Society.<sup>36</sup> Prior to the interview the author discussed any

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<sup>36</sup> Oral History Society, 'Is Your Oral History Ethical and Legal?'. Available: <http://www.ohs.org.uk/advice/ethical-and-legal/> [accessed 26 December 2011].



concerns with the subject before both completed and signed two copies of the Oral History Recording Agreement, a copy of which was kept by the interviewee along with the copies of the Invitation for Interview and the Interviewee Information Sheet.

Interviewees of all genders were actively sought, through the production and delivery of leaflets, insertion of articles about the project into various local newspapers, selective posts on social media, or by recommendation from others. Some interviews, such as those with the women of Workington, were presented to the author by happenstance. A chance sighting of an advertisement for a social event presented the opportunity of a last-minute, four hundred mile round journey on in the hope that someone present might know the women players in question and help me contact them. Some interviewees such as Tom Whitehead, put me in touch with other people who were relevant to my research. Their support was invaluable and the author's gratitude is due to them all.

Given the paucity of sources, anyone who could potentially add context or detail to the developing case studies was interviewed. Only when it became clear that, due to both time and the physical constraint of a word count, anything that occurred after the 1970s would be unlikely to feature did the author selectively discount potential subjects whose experiences fell into that period. Interviews were mostly carried out in the subjects' homes, or in the case of Carole Kyle, resident in California, by telephone. Interviews lasted between two and four hours in length. Time constraints prohibited faithful transcription of every interview, so in order to utilise the recordings efficiently key

words, phrases and notes were made with time markers to enable rapid retrieval during the initial analysis and subsequent writing up of the research findings.

Prior to the interviews, I was mindful of the words of Bosworth who recalled the ‘traps [she] fell into during [her] first venture into oral history’, when she interviewed a retired politician having ‘not done enough research before broaching the topics [she] wanted to explore’.<sup>37</sup> As a result, where possible I followed her lead in reading local histories or other literature that might help me gain some kind of insight into the geographical place, the community or other contexts that may be relevant or referred to during the interviews. Open-ended questions were asked, which allowed the richness of the human stories to permeate the interviews and always this portrayed much more about the social context and changes in society than would have occurred had a rigid interview structure been employed. As such, many of the recordings are very lengthy but all are an enjoyable listen and will hopefully be of use to other researchers with different research priorities in the future.

Extensive searches have also been made for appropriate sources, such as court reports, asylum records, census returns, electoral rolls, unpublished documentation, family scrapbooks and other ephemera, local and other official archives. Individual case studies have been developed and where appropriate detailed family histories of women have been undertaken, using genealogical sources. The use of personal biography is a way

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<sup>37</sup> Michal Bosworth, “‘Let me tell you...’ Memory and the Practice of Oral History’ in Joan Tumblety (ed.), *Memory and History: Understanding Memory as Source and Subject*, (London: Routledge, 2013), p.21.

of examining women's lives at a deeper level and allows the researcher to highlight the specific issues that individual women faced.

## Chapter Synopses

Chapter one shows how women participated in rugby league as spectators, but also how they operated as facilitators of the sport, and even ventured to play rugby league. It explores the involuntary participation of women in the form of wives, siblings and children of players and administrators, sometimes at great personal disadvantage, examining the relations of these women to the men in their lives at a time of social and economic change.

Chapter two puts women's engagement with the sport into the context of the perceived 'social emancipation' of women at the turn of the century, demonstrating how the sport was influenced by these changes and consolidated its masculinity.<sup>38</sup> The impact of family on the sport and the sport on the family is presented. On-field death and the community's attempts to support those left behind is discussed, interrogating the idea of community. The chapter also shows that the symbolic nature of sport in the upholding of gender order is reflected in the actions of the militant suffragettes.

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<sup>38</sup> *The Manchester Guardian*, 01 January, 1901, p.8.

The third chapter looks at the lack of women's involvement in the playing of rugby league and explores the reasons for this by comparing and contrasting it with the phenomenon of women's soccer during this period. It scrutinises how women's soccer was framed in the contemporary discourse and offers a different reading to that of the prevailing historical narrative, suggesting that ultimately women's soccer presented no fundamental challenge to the gender order, helping to explain why women did not make attempts to play rugby league.

Chapter four delves into the inter-war period, and the increased interest in rugby league by women, which harked back to the nineteenth century. It shows how women operated within the sport in ways that adhered to gendered expectations, but used their agency to find other ways to function within the sport, particularly via the medium of supporters' clubs, and how their voluntary work was critical to the sport's survival.

The fifth chapter looks at the impact of World War Two and presents the case of Liverpool's Rose Kyle, the first female rugby league club secretary. It interrogates the concept of leisure as opposite to work, and examines ideas of shared leisure. Chapter six follows on from the previous chapter in examining the post-World War Two period and considers the changes in gender relations within marriage in a rugby league context, using personal letters between a player and his wife. It studies the changes in women's roles in society and uses oral histories to tell the story of a series of women's matches in a community located in a deprived area of Workington, considering the impact of women's influence inside and outside the home.

The final chapter contemplates the changes of the 1950s and the 1960s and the new opportunities within employment and education that allowed women to operate within rugby league in more managerial positions. This chapter presents two case studies, from Huddersfield and Hull, whose women are embodiments of the continuity and change in women's lives during this time. It also examines the backlash against second-wave feminism and how this is expressed within the culture of the rugby league queens.

## Prologue: The Angel in the (Public) House

You who come of a younger and happier generation may not have heard of her — you may not know what I mean by the Angel in the House. I will describe her as shortly as I can. She was intensely sympathetic. She was immensely charming. She was utterly unselfish. She excelled in the difficult arts of family life. She sacrificed herself daily. If there was chicken, she took the leg; if there was a draught she sat in it — in short she was so constituted that she never had a mind or a wish of her own, but preferred to sympathize always with the minds and wishes of others. Above all — I need not say it — she was pure. Her purity was supposed to be her chief beauty — her blushes, her great grace. In those days — the last of Queen Victoria — every house had its Angel.<sup>1</sup>

When Isabella Jardine was born in 1824 to her skilled millwright father, James, it would be expected that she would grow, be taught the domestic skills by her mother, perhaps work, inevitably marry, become the “angel” in her husband’s house and bear his children. Her whole life would walk along this well-worn path that was a woman’s lot in the early nineteenth-century. As Coventry Patmore wrote in his poem that coined the phrase ‘The Angel in the House’, ‘Man must be pleased; but him to please/ Is woman's pleasure’.<sup>2</sup>

Little did the infant Isabella know that she was born on the brink of change. Just as the burgeoning onset of the Industrial Revolution would thrust her father into his trade’s

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<sup>1</sup> Virginia Woolf, ‘Professions for Women’ in *The Death of the Moth, and Other Essays*, (London: The Hogarth Press, 1942), p.150.

<sup>2</sup> Coventry Patmore, ‘Canto XI’ in *The Angel in the House*, (London: G. Bell and Sons Ltd. [1854-1862] 1920), p.53.

‘significant transitional stage from the traditional crafts to the modern engineer’, she too would go on to live her life at the zeitgeist.<sup>3</sup> During her lifetime the post-Revolution *querelle des femmes* would radicalise, interrogating ‘the economic, political, and sexual issues of the impending women’s movement [...] animated by a notion of social progress and intentional social change’.<sup>4</sup> Not only would she witness the expansion of women’s rights during the nineteenth-century, but she would become a template for women; women who, like her, would make history.

Isabella married her first husband on 20<sup>th</sup> March, 1849. She was twenty-four, and her husband, Thomas Barlow, was just twenty. Both were from skilled working-class families; he was a gentleman, the son of a farmer, and resided in Camp Street, Lower Broughton, a suburb of Salford. Isabella lived four miles away in Hulme with her family. How the couple met cannot be known, but three years into their marriage, on September 12<sup>th</sup>, 1852, Isabella gave birth to a son, Thomas. Two years later, on February 27<sup>th</sup>, 1854, the couple purchased at auction the tenant’s right, fixtures and fittings of the ‘well-established’ Bridge Inn, Broughton Road, Salford.<sup>5</sup> The Inn was large, having a ‘bar parlour, club and newsrooms, taproom’, five bedrooms, a spacious kitchen and was ‘of modern construction, having a plate glass front into the best thoroughfare in Salford, being also in the immediate neighbourhood of many works and manufactories’.<sup>6</sup> The auctioneers’ notice made clear that this was an opportunity not to be missed: ‘to any person with a

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<sup>3</sup> R. A. Buchanan, *Industrial Archaeology in Britain*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd. 1972), p.103.

<sup>4</sup> *Querelle des femmes* translates as “women quarrel”. This would become known as the “woman question” in the later nineteenth-century. Joan Kelly, ‘Early Feminist Theory and the “Querelle des Femmes”, 1400-1789’, in *Signs*, Vol. 8, No 1 (1982), p.6.

<sup>5</sup> *Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser*, 25 February, 1954, p.12.

<sup>6</sup> *Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser*, 25 February, 1954, p.12.

small capital such an opportunity of obtaining a desirable and lucrative business rarely occurs'.<sup>7</sup> From where the Barlows gained their "small capital" is lost in the ether, but sadly for the couple they could not enjoy their venture together for long, for on October 27<sup>th</sup>, Isabella's husband died, aged just twenty-five years. High mortality rates in the nineteenth-century meant that this was not an uncommon occurrence; in the 1850s approximately 19% of marriages would suffer a bereavement within the first ten years and in Manchester alone, 14.5% of the female population aged over twenty were widows.<sup>8</sup>

From the midst of mourning and the realisation of widowhood came a new-found independence, for as Mr. Weller in Dickens' *The Pickwick Papers* reminds us, "'Widders are 'ceptions to ev'ry rule'".<sup>9</sup> Isabella now had *agency*. No longer under the custody of her husband she had such control over her business and her finances that would be denied many women for decades to come. As a result, Isabella remained at the Bridge Inn and on November 29<sup>th</sup> she became the sole licensee.<sup>10</sup> In this respect, that the Barlows were successful business owners of a working-class background stood Isabella in good stead, for, being the landlady of a popular public house, she was not left bereft of financial means like many poor, middle- or upper-class women were in the mid-nineteenth-

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<sup>7</sup> *Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser*, 25 February, 1954, p.12.

<sup>8</sup> Michael Anderson, 'The Social Implications of Demographic Change' in (ed.) F.M.L. Thompson, *The Cambridge Social History of Britain, 1750-1950*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp.30-31; David R. Green & Alastair Owens, 'Gentlewomanly Capitalism? Spinsters, Widows, and Wealth Holding in England and Wales, c. 1800-1860' in *Economic History Review*, LVI, N<sup>o</sup>.3 (2002), p.513.

<sup>9</sup> Charles Dickens, *The Pickwick Papers*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, [1837] 1986). p.344.

<sup>10</sup> *Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser*, 02 December, 1854, p.7.



century.<sup>11</sup> Isabella even had a little money to spare to help others, and in the following January she kindly donated 10 shillings to the Borough of Salford Patriotic Fund in support of those women and children who were devastated by bereavement having lost husbands and fathers in the Crimean War.<sup>12</sup>



**Figure 1:** The Bridge Inn, 238 Lower Broughton Road, Salford.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> For more on the precarious state of widows' finances in the middle- and upper-classes, see Pat Jalland, *Death in the Victorian Family*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), esp. pp.230-250.

<sup>12</sup> *Manchester Times*, 06 January, 1955, p.1.

<sup>13</sup> Image: Neil Richardson, *Salford Pubs - Part Two: Including Islington, Ordsall Lane and Ordsall, Idfield Road, Regent Road and Broughton*, Manchester: Self-published, 2003).

For two-and-a-half years Isabella remained a single woman of independent means, until the occasion of her second marriage, to one George Boardman, in December 1856. Throughout their marriage both worked hard; Isabella remained the licensee of the Bridge Inn whilst George was employed as a warehouseman, helping Isabella in the public house when he could. However, sadness would again descend on Isabella, who was left widowed once more by the death of forty-seven-year-old George on April 25<sup>th</sup>, 1872. George, left his wife as sole executrix of his effects worth 'under £300'.<sup>14</sup>

Fast-forward to April 15<sup>th</sup>, 1894. As seventy-year-old Isabella Boardman lay on her deathbed, little did she know how important she had been. When Robert Seddon decided to set up a rugby team, Broughton Rangers in 1877, the hospitable Isabella agreed that the Bridge Inn could be their home.<sup>15</sup> Here the business meetings of the club took place and it was where the players changed into their kit on a match day.<sup>16</sup> Isabella's involvement with Broughton Rangers earned the club the infamous nickname "Mrs. Boardman's Boys" because she, 'according to all reports is a regular mother to the Rangers, at least she says they are her boys, and they appear content to have it so'.<sup>17</sup> At the club's annual dinner, held at the Bridge Inn in 1881, the club presented her with a 'handsome clock' as a token of gratitude. Isabella responded with

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<sup>14</sup> 'Boardman, George', 14 May, 1872, *England & Wales, National Probate Calendar (Index of Wills and Administrations), 1858-1966, 1973-1995*. Available: [www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com). According to the National Archives' currency converter, this would have equated to approximately £13,710 in 2005. Available: <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/currency/>

<sup>15</sup> Trevor Delaney, *The Grounds of Rugby League*, (Keighley: Self-published, 1987) p.189.

<sup>16</sup> *Athletic News*, 05 May 1880, p.6.

<sup>17</sup> *Athletic News*, 13 April, 1881, p.1.

the best speech of the evening, [she] in words which could not have been better chosen, expressed her intention to be more than a mother to the Rangers than ever. Her remarks were in splendid taste, and were much appreciated by those present.<sup>18</sup>

Isabella was greatly valued by the club, so much so that after the Rangers' game at Halifax on January 28<sup>th</sup> the following year, the Major who presided over the post-match dinner spontaneously proposed a toast to "Mrs. Boardman's health" and 'a telegram was despatched to the worthy lady informing her of the same'.<sup>19</sup> Such a gesture is testament to how, even when she was not present, Isabella was part of the fabric of the Rangers and her spirit was with them wherever they went. The strict rules concerning amateurism that would eventually split the sport in two and form the creation of the Northern Union (later rugby league), meant that the players would work all week to earn a living and then play tough games of rugby on a Saturday afternoon. The welcoming, 'hospitable roof' of the Bridge Inn, with its motherly publican, provided the men some comfort; a place to relax and unwind after a hard game or after work.<sup>20</sup> At the club's annual dinner of 1882, Isabella herself expressed the close connection she had to the club, stating that:

she was only too glad to be of service to her "boys," and none could be more gratified by any successes the Rangers might achieve than she, and none was more cut up when they retired from a field defeated.<sup>21</sup>

Isabella had looked after the club in a similar fashion for nine whole years when she announced her retirement in January 1887. The Rangers' 'foster mother' had spent

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<sup>18</sup> *Athletic News*, 13 April, 1881, p.1.

<sup>19</sup> *Athletic News*, 01 February, 1882, p.1.

<sup>20</sup> *Athletic News*, 05 April 1882, p.1.

<sup>21</sup> *Athletic News*, 26 April 1882, p.1.

thirty-three years at the helm of the Bridge Inn and they celebrated with a farewell party on 11<sup>th</sup> January. 'A large number of members' attended and the 'entire evening was devoted to conviviality'.<sup>22</sup> The club's tribute to her, which was reported in the *Athletic News*, is repeated here in full:

During the evening an illuminated address was presented to Mrs. Boardman by the president, who in a short but excellent speech told the lady how the "Boys" appreciated all her many kindnesses. The vice-chairman and Messrs. Robertson and Thomson followed with a few remarks. After the presentation the worthy lady replied in her usual pleasing manner, and in closing told the "boys" that if ever they needed a friend they would always find one in herself. The address, which was most splendidly illuminated by Mr. J. Cowburn, of Higher Broughton, ran thus:

"To Mrs. Boardman. – Dear Madam, - We, the undersigned, on behalf of our fellow members of the Broughton Rangers F.C., desire on this, the occasion of your leaving the Bridge inn, Lower Broughton, to express to you our high appreciation of your motherly kindness to the members of our club during the nine years we have been associated together.

We also desire to bear testimony to the thoughtful interest you have always taken in the club's affairs, and the many ways in which you have contributed to its success.

We wish you most heartily good health and strength to enjoy the repose which you so well deserve, and hope that your life may be prolonged for many years to come. We are, dear Madam, yours in great esteem,

THOMAS SMITH, President.

JOHN ROBERTSON, Captain.

HENRY WILCOCK, Hon, Treasurer.

GEORGE F. THOMSON, Hon. Sec.

January 5<sup>th</sup>, 1887."<sup>23</sup>

The acknowledgment that Isabella had "contributed to the club's success" outside of her "motherly kindness" is an interesting one. When Isabella died on April 15<sup>th</sup>, 1894 she left

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<sup>22</sup> *Athletic News*, 11 January, 1887, p.2.

<sup>23</sup> *Athletic News*, 11 January, 1887, p.2.

a will worth £4734. 14s. 10d., which was a phenomenal amount of money for a working-class woman at this time and shows an aptitude for business and fiscal management.<sup>24</sup> It is highly possible that Isabella, a woman of means, contributed financially in some way to the club. Her widowhood allowed her the freedom to determine how to spend her money, so if she wished to contribute financially there would have been no barriers to her doing so and she certainly aided the players if they were in need of fiscal support. On her death in 1894 the club president, Thomas Smith, eulogised Isabella, remembering that ““she was with the members on every occasion and if they were in need of money, and at the time they sometimes were, though they are better off now, they always found ‘ma’ ready to help””.<sup>25</sup> The high esteem with which the club considered her certainly suggests that she did more than supply a meeting room and a friendly ear. The players, management and members of Broughton Rangers had become something of an extended family for this surrogate mother-figure, perhaps even one of great comfort for a twice-widowed woman, and she held it in great affection. During her retirement she was never far away, spending the rest of her days living across the road from the Inn, at 216 Lower Broughton Road, until her death seven years later. The memory of Mrs. Boardman lived on, ringing throughout rugby like a chorus, with spectators and the media using the moniker “Mrs. Boardman’s Boys” to refer to the Broughton club long after she has passed. In every way, Isabella Boardman was the angel of the public house that nurtured the fledgling Broughton club, and her example would resonate throughout sport, via the lives of thousands of women over the next century and beyond.

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<sup>24</sup> ‘Boardman, Isabella’, 15 April, 1894, *England & Wales, National Probate Calendar (Index of Wills and Administrations), 1858-1966, 1973-1995*. Available: [www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com). According to the National Archives’ currency converter, this would have equated to approximately £283,563 in 2005. Available: <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/currency/>

<sup>25</sup> Graham Morris, *Rugby League in Manchester*, (Brimscombe Port: Tempus Publishing Limited, 2003), p.16.



# Chapter One: Victorian Values, Violence and Violations of Gender

## Football Through the Looking Glass

On 8<sup>th</sup> March, 1878, Devon's Torrington FC walked out onto Furzebeam Hill to face neighbours Dolton FC in a determined battle under rugby union rules. A large crowd had gathered for the three o'clock kick off and among it were 'several ladies' who had come to cheer on their team. With local pride at stake, the rivalry was high and a 'most exciting and spirited contest' ensued. Not since the Civil War and the Battle of Torrington in 1646 had the Devonian village seen such a hard-fought encounter, and one could be forgiven for thinking that the spirit of Sir Thomas Fairfax lived on in the Torrington players, for eventually, in large part due to the excellent kicking of 'Young Mr. Tanton, of Hill Farm', the Dolton footballing infantry gave way and escaped to fight another day.<sup>1</sup>

"'It's war without death – the best sport in the world'", declared Great Britain coach Brian Noble, echoing the voices of many who, since the nineteenth century, have used war as a metaphor in declaring rugby in all its forms as the manliest of sports.<sup>2</sup> But for as long as rugby has been a war game of choice, this 'assertion of masculinity through physicality' has always held an attraction for some women, who have been ever-present in the rugby world, standing pitch side in all weathers to support their clubs.<sup>3</sup> This chapter looks at women's involvement in rugby in the late nineteenth century, during the "great split" of 1895, to around the turn of the century.

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<sup>1</sup> *North Devon Journal*, 14 March, 1878, p.3.

<sup>2</sup> *League of their Own II: Warriors Down Under*, directed by Rob Sloman [DVD]. (Lace International Ltd., 2007).

<sup>3</sup> Tony Collins, *A Social History of English Rugby Union*, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2009), p.74.

Consequently, this chapter examines the involvement of women in rugby both on and off the pitch. The latter is crucial as women's involvement in all sport is not merely about playing the game. In discussing how women participated at all levels of rugby as spectators, facilitators, in supporting roles as well as players, this chapter takes a new approach that is in contrast to other historians of women's sport who have previously focussed almost exclusively on women playing the game.<sup>4</sup> Many women also involuntarily participated in men's sport as wives, mothers, siblings and children, often with detriment to themselves. This chapter will use case studies to examine the complexity of the relationships women had with their men and the sport at a time of rapid and fundamental change in Britain and in the sport itself.

It will consider women as spectators, and discuss the differences between the male and female gaze during the act of spectatorship. How women viewed the game will be evidenced from letters to the press, as will the backlash against women correspondents, both of which will be examined in the context of contemporary discussions about sexual politics and the "nature" of women. The decline in female spectatorship will be considered in relation to the economic priorities of families at the turn of the century and how women themselves participated in capitalism. The story of Emily Valentine, oft thought to be the first girl to pick up the ball and run with it will be

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<sup>4</sup> Kathleen E. McCrone, *Sport and the Physical Emancipation of English Women, 1870-1914*, (London: Routledge, 1988); Jennifer Hargreaves, *Sporting Females: Critical Issues in the History and Sociology of Women's Sports*, (London: Routledge, 1994); Jean Williams, *A Game for Rough Girls?: A History of Women's Football in Britain*, (London: Routledge, 2003); James F. Lee, *The Lady Footballers: Struggling to Play in Victorian Britain*, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2008).



studied as will the circumstances in which women played soccer in the 1880s and 1890s. Taking note of the complications in distinguishing rugby from soccer in the sources of the time, this chapter will discuss the motivations behind women playing the football codes and suggest women's soccer was considered an entertaining spectacle, akin to music hall, rather than a serious sporting endeavour. It will analyse the contemporary discussion of the "myth" of women's fragility and how the cultural belief in the weakness of middle-class women framed the discourse of women's participation in and spectatorship of sport. The framing of the formation of the British Ladies Football club will be evaluated in the context of debates about women's health and beauty and the destabilisation of gender boundaries, and the involvement of Lady Florence Dixie in the club's formation as a vehicle through which to promote her rational dress agenda and her wider concerns about patriarchy will be put forward. It will be posited that women's endeavours in sport had little effect on fashion, and that sporting dress was a signifier of prestige for a leisured middle-class and practicality rather than female emancipation.

'Don't imagine that all the spectators were men, for they were not', declared *The Yorkshireman* in 1883, commenting on a game between Yorkshire and Cheshire:

Indeed, the female element was very largely represented and the comments from this portion of the gathering were as numerous and as critical as those of their brothers, husbands and fathers.<sup>5</sup>

In the 1870s and into the 1880s, women all across England enjoyed free admission to matches, making it an ideal way to spend some social time without spending precious household income. Wives, mothers, sisters, daughters and friends would watch with their

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<sup>5</sup> *Yorkshireman*, 03 March, 1883, p.5.

menfolk, cheering their team to victory and offering consoling words in defeat. In her essay, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', Laura Mulvey outlined the notion of looking as an inherently masculine operation, coining the phrase "male gaze".<sup>6</sup> The theory surrounding the male gaze argues that cultural constructs, such as cinema, art and literature, depict the world from a heterosexual, male perspective and that a spectator, 'regardless of the actual sex' stands in a position that has been masculinized.<sup>7</sup> In rugby terms, a "critical" woman spectator, as described above, appropriates the male position in their spectatorship. She views the game through a masculine, heterosexual lens, watching the action of the players as constructed by the masculine ideals of how rugby ought to be played.<sup>8</sup> Men are rugby's protagonists, and the female gaze, the action of women looking at the men on the pitch, is passive, controlled by the masculine narrative of rules and tactics, as well as by the men playing the sport on the pitch who are in charge of the game.<sup>9</sup> The press reported the presence of female spectators at rugby matches 'as far back as the first Yorkshire versus Lancashire game in 1870'.<sup>10</sup> International matches also drew in the female population, with *Bell's Life in London* reporting that 'several hundred' ladies were in Edinburgh the following year to see the first match between Scotland and England, taking advantage of a 'specially enclosed' area 'some 50 yards from the side of the ground'. It is clear that the gaze of those women spectators was not the

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<sup>6</sup> Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' in *Screen*, Vol. 16. Nº 3 (1975), pp.6-18.

<sup>7</sup> Laura Mulvey, 'Afterthoughts... Inspired by "Duel in the Sun"' in *Framework*, Vol. 15 (1981), p.12.

<sup>8</sup> In discussions of female sports spectatorship, the discussion of the female gaze and how this is influenced by patriarchy is sadly absent.

<sup>9</sup> For interesting discussions how women appropriate male positions in watching film, see Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' in *Screen*, Vol. 16. Nº 3 (1975), pp.6-18; Laura Mulvey, 'Afterthoughts... Inspired by "Duel in the Sun"' in *Framework*, Vol. 15 (1981), pp.12-15; Mary Ann Doane, 'Subjectivity and Desire: An(other) Way of Looking', in *The Desire to Desire: The Woman's Film of The 1940s*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press 1987), pp.1-13. E. Ann Kaplan, 'Is the Gaze Male?' in *Feminism and Film*, (ed.) E. Ann Kaplan, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp.119-138.

<sup>10</sup> Tony Collins, *Rugby's Great Split: Class, Culture and the Origins of Rugby League Football*, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006), p.36.

only observational activity taking place that day, for the journalist saw fit to add that the women themselves ‘added materially to the brilliancy of the scene’. He went on to add his hope that the construction of another special enclosure along the touch line would render women ‘tempted to “lend enchantment to the view”’.<sup>11</sup> The writer quotes the poem ‘Pleasures of Hope’ (1799), by Scottish poet Thomas Campbell. It is an interesting choice, for the first three stanzas tell of how ‘with delight, we linger to survey/ The promis’d joy’ of viewing beautiful landscapes ‘from afar’.<sup>12</sup> In journalism as in other cultural products, the male gaze subjects women spectators to ‘a controlling and curious gaze’.<sup>13</sup> The women in the crowd provided the journalist with a distraction from the narrative of the game; they are admired for their physical appearance, which is a significant aspect of the “brilliancy” of the rugby league spectacle. The gaze is all the more appealing because the women are at a distance and lend themselves to sexual fantasy.

Such was the appetite for rugby’s masculine endeavours that in 1884, twenty-five per cent of the crowd at Manningham versus Hull were women.<sup>14</sup> The other popular football code, soccer, was also not immune from female interest, with two thousand women attending Preston North End on Easter Monday, 1885.<sup>15</sup> Returning home victorious with rugby’s Yorkshire Cup in 1891, Pontefract were greeted by a large welcoming party that included a ‘great number of the fair sex’, which the writer of *The*

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<sup>11</sup> All quotations from *Bell’s Life in London*, 20 January, 1872, p.8.

<sup>12</sup> ‘The Pleasures of Hope’ in Thomas Campbell, *The Poetical Works of Thomas Campbell*, (Paris, 1825) pp.1-45, l.9-11.

<sup>13</sup> Laura Mulvey, ‘Visual Pleasure’, p.8.

<sup>14</sup> *Yorkshireman*, 27 September, 1884, p.5.

<sup>15</sup> Tony Mason, *Association Football and English Society, 1863-1915*, (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1983), p.152; Rob Lewis, “‘Our Lady Specialists at Pikes Lane’: Female Spectators in Early English Professional Football, 1880–1914’ in *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, Vol. 26, Nº 15 (2009), pp. 2161-2181.

*Yorkshireman* saw fit to appraise in chauvinist terms, describing them as ‘old girls and new, young and pretty, old and, er, well, er, respected’.<sup>16</sup> The event provided an unusual, happy spectacle for the market town and gave its women not only the chance to celebrate some civic pride, but also a social opportunity, a chance to break up their daily routines and mingle with their friends and neighbours.

As *The Yorkshireman* attested, women knew their rugby and could be “as critical” as any man about the nuances of the game. On April 13<sup>th</sup> 1881, a letter to the editor of the *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer* was published from “A lady who takes great interest in the game”. The correspondent commented on the style and quality of play during the Yorkshire Cup Final, which saw Dewsbury beat Wakefield Trinity at Cardigan Fields in Leeds. Wakefield had won the Yorkshire Cup the previous two seasons, and the woman lamented that ‘the only way Dewsbury had of defending themselves against their opponents was by kicking into touch, which, in my opinion, shows great lack of courage’.<sup>17</sup> She continued, ‘Wakefield Trinity may yet think themselves the better team of the two, as anyone who witnessed the game must be so convinced’. The letter, which displayed a knowledge of the game and was reasoned and moderate in tone, sadly did not receive a similarly crafted response. In the only reply to be published, “M. A.” wrote a total of thirty-four lines that did not address the woman’s points on the play of the Dewsbury team, but instead mocked the writer. ‘When a lady says she thinks a thing, it is seldom safe to contradict her’, he opined, before remarking that ‘it is a little amusing to

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<sup>16</sup> Quoted in Tony Collins, *Rugby’s Great Split: Class, Culture and the Origins of Rugby League Football*, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006), p.36.

<sup>17</sup> *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, 13 April, 1881, p.8.

notice the delicious inconsequence with which your fair correspondent forthwith proceeds to say severe things about the Dewsbury men'.<sup>18</sup> Drawing on the stereotype of the dangerous, opinionated woman, M. A. read amusement into the woman's letter thereby belittling her opinion on the game. The juxtaposition of the "fair sex", which is gentle in appearance and nature, with "severe", that is the unpleasant, harsh opinion she has professed, emphasises the deceptive nature of women, who may be pleasant on the outside but cruel on the inside. Unsurprisingly, M. A. continued his personal attack, failing to justify why he believed her opinion to be "severe" in footballing terms, instead claiming that she has been 'betrayed into just one very little error of judgment'. The diminutive adjective layers more sarcasm onto her "severe" opinion, making it an error so small that it is a mere trifle. Nevertheless, it is so insignificant that it warranted a response more than twice as long as the offending opinion! M. A.'s acerbity continued as he states that Dewsbury's 'joy is blighted' by the spoilsport and her 'chastening discipline' that carries connotations of the overly-strict mother. He went on to use language that hinted at her irrational pettiness, such as 'grudge' and 'bitter', and the phrase 'pray let there be no more bickerings or jealousies'. He asked 'is it not a pity that such a letter should have been written?', the nature of which suggests that it is not the rationale behind the lady's opinion that he objected to, but that a woman dare venture into the public sphere of a regional newspaper to profess it that is the underlying issue for the respondent. It is interesting to note that the woman's letter unemotionally discussed the tactics and strategies of the game, whereas the male respondent's argument is personal and subjective, an approach deemed typically feminine at the time. That the editor instructed 'this correspondence must now close' at the end of the letter hints that the

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<sup>18</sup> *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, 14 April, 1881, p.5.

woman's letter may have received more than one reactionary response.<sup>19</sup> This written exchange is an early example of how a woman's knowledge of sport would be attacked, regardless of its legitimacy of fact, based solely on her gender. Such derision of women's opinions on sporting matters would be replicated in print and other media over and over into the twentieth century.

Putting pen to paper was not all that unusual for the women rugby supporters of Wakefield, for in 1885 a group of "young ladies" wrote to Fred Bonner, the captain of Bradford, accusing the team of cowardice 'for their refusal to play Trinity that season'.<sup>20</sup> However, for the Victorians a woman giving voice to her opinion was considered a transgressional act not expected of her gender, as one "gentleman" commented to a reporter from the *Pontefract and Castleford Express* in November 1895, when Featherstone played Kinsley:

amongst the motley throng were to be noticed many enthusiastic members of the gentle sex, who walked about in the mud, and gave vent to their feelings, as one gentleman remarked, like "right men".<sup>21</sup>

Even the act of going to a football game was decried as an unfeminine thing to do and inspired much writing against women's attendance at matches. In one fine example from a woman's journal that was repeated in many local presses, one writer said:

It would involve no great sacrifice, and be very much more creditable to the sex which is supposed to be all gentleness and sympathy and tenderness, if women would discontinue their attendance at football matches. It has been remarked of late that more and more girls are seen on these occasions on the grounds,

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<sup>19</sup> *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, 14 April, 1881, p.5.

<sup>20</sup> Tony Collins, *Rugby's Great Split*, p.36.

<sup>21</sup> *Pontefract and Castleford Express*, 30 November, 1895, p.7.

and that they apparently follow the games with interest. Football may or may not be a “manly” sport, but it certainly is not one which women, who should be “tender over drowning flies,” ought to take pleasure in witnessing. Accidents are very frequent, and “scrimmages,” though possibly exciting to athletic men and boys, are by no means refining or amusing exhibitions. Women undoubtedly lose their influence over and attraction for men when they dispossess themselves of their womanly attributes; and girls who constantly attend football matches, and think nothing of seeing their own and other people’s brothers and cousins maimed, most assuredly so.<sup>22</sup>

In evoking the lyric verse of Alfred Lord Tennyson’s ‘In Memoriam’, a popular poem of the period, the piece is almost its own requiem to a lost femininity, one abandoned at home when a woman attends a football match. Women, it lectures, ought not to enjoy football, for it is rough and physically dangerous and goes against the natural nurturing qualities that women possess, a notion the British writer and early feminist Edith Simcox would have disparaged: ‘the natural woman’, she wrote in her 1887 article ‘The Capacity of Women’, ‘is as prone as the natural man to enjoy bull fights and even gladiatorial shows’.<sup>23</sup>

The idea that women should not enjoy such “manly” sports and that if they do, they become unattractive to men and “undoubtedly lose their influence” over them, is reflective of sexual politics at the end of the nineteenth century. In 1889, Maria Sharpe, secretary of the exclusive Men and Women’s Club that was set up to debate gender politics, denounced men for propagating belief in the inherent weakness and submissive nature of women in order to control them sexually. ‘Is it not really passive women that

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<sup>22</sup> *The Derby Mercury*, 15 March 1893, p.6.

<sup>23</sup> Edith Simcox, ‘The Capacity of Women’ in *Nineteenth Century*, May edition (1887), p.401.

[men] want', she wrote, 'so that they might have their own way with them[?]'.<sup>24</sup> As Lucy Bland has noted, 'the dominant constructions of femininity were used to justify women's exclusion from political power and public space' and the public space of the sports field was no exception to this rule.<sup>25</sup> Women were the safeguards of a higher morality and the private sphere of 'the home and women's role within it' was 'the foundation of moral order'. As Edith Simcox argued, the higher morality of women was a recent construct born of authoritative Christianity that had bled into wider cultural discourse.<sup>26</sup>

Nevertheless, as the football codes began to attract working-class spectators in the tens of thousands, for a woman, attendance at rugby and soccer matches was increasingly seen as an expression of her unruly tendencies and incompatible with the perpetuated notions of femininity and its higher morality. By publicly showing a detachment from the traditional loyalties, such a woman advertised that she is unlikely to be submissive to the will of her husband, sexually or otherwise, and therefore leaves herself open to being rejected by men.

However, not everyone wished women would refrain from going to rugby games or be prevented from taking an active interest in the sport. In 1891

The football columnist of *The Yorkshireman* was moved to protest about a "men only" meeting of Keighley FC "comrades":  
 "What about the ladies who patronise the Highfield Lane enclosure? ... are they not comrades as well?"<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Quoted in Lucy Bland, *Banishing the Beast: English Feminism and Sexual Morality, 1885-1914*, (London: Penguin, 1995), p.41.

<sup>25</sup> Lucy Bland, *Banishing the Beast*, p.48.

<sup>26</sup> Lucy Bland, *Banishing the Beast*, p.50.

<sup>27</sup> Tony Collins, *Rugby's Great Split*, p.36.



In 1897 Mr Harry Brown, rugby union's Yorkshire First Competition committee president, hoped there would be some way to 'make it possible for a gentleman to take a lady to football matches'.<sup>28</sup> In pure business terms, such companionship at games would increase the numbers attending matches and subsequently the revenue for the sport. Being taken to see matches by a man also legitimised women's presence within the rules of Victorian gendered etiquette. To be *taken* to a game was a passive action, sanctioned by the man doing the taking. The woman's presence at the game with a man was also a visible display of her subordination to the prevailing gender hierarchy. The man's control of the woman's footballing experience gave the woman a respectability thought lacking in those women who choose to attend under their own agency.

But it also had another effect; women at matches of both rugby and soccer codes were considered to be a calming influence on the crowds, as the *Liverpool Echo* discovered in its archive of match reports: 'it was only the presence of ladies which restrained some of the more vociferous spectators from giving emphatic expression to their feelings'.<sup>29</sup> Women at football games, then, were the visceral embodiments of that "higher morality" to which the menfolk should aspire. Yet it was the proliferation of this rowdy, coarse language that put many women off from attending matches in the first place. In 1898, *Yorkshire Chat* commented on the steady decline in women spectators at football games throughout the 1880s and 1890s, due to the 'foul language one hears so repeatedly' from the mouths of the male spectators.<sup>30</sup> As Mr Brown lamented, 'if club

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<sup>28</sup> *Hull Daily Mail*, 06 January, 1897, p.5.

<sup>29</sup> *Liverpool Echo*, 27 August, 1949, p.3.

<sup>30</sup> *Yorkshire Chat*, 18 November, 1898, p.7.

committees would take notice of persons who used bad language and showed disorderly behaviour' something could be done to draw women through the turnstiles.<sup>31</sup> Swearing was a constant issue that was repeatedly reported in local presses, with the officials often bearing the brunt of the profanity. Teams would often be met with a wall of hostility from the crowds: 'from the ball being set in motion until the end of the game the noise was "simply awful"'.<sup>32</sup> In 1900, when Phoenix Rovers 'complained against the conduct of the spectators towards their touch-judge' the York and District Rugby Union were mindful that 'every season cases of this description had cropped up and cautions have been of no avail'.<sup>33</sup> They determined that all officials from thereon in must report cases of bad language to the Union and that the referee would have the power to halt the game until the offenders had been ejected from the ground.<sup>34</sup> Swearing, however, did not put off everyone, including Mrs Brown, wife of Harry Brown, who was known to have attended matches with her husband and presented championship medals to the Featherstone team at the end of the 1897-98 season.<sup>35</sup>

Not all women subscribed to the angelic femininity and expected of women at games. As Collins has discovered, women could partake in hooliganism if they found their team on the wrong side of a result: 'after winning a cup tie at Horbury in 1884, the Batley team found themselves being pelted with red-hot coals by a woman as they left the ground'. In 1888, the chairman of Swinton had clearly had his patience tested as he

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<sup>31</sup> *Hull Daily Mail*, 06 January, 1897, p.5.

<sup>32</sup> *Pontefract and Castleford Express*, 30 November, 1895, p.7.

<sup>33</sup> *York Herald*, 19 September, 1900, p.6.

<sup>34</sup> *York Herald*, 19 September, 1900, p.6.

<sup>35</sup> Ian Clayton, *100 Years of Featherstone Rugby*, (Leeds: Self-published, 1985), p.16.

derided the 'bad manners and rowdiness' of female spectators.<sup>36</sup> Nor was soccer immune from the female furore, for that same year, women supporters of Ecclesfield shouted insults at Sheffield Wednesday players at the final of the Sheffield Cup and a referee was attacked by women home supporters of Great Lever (Bolton) at a match versus Preston North End.<sup>37</sup>

Fiscal matters may also partly explain why women's attendance at rugby games fell away by the turn of the century, as more clubs began to charge admittance for women into the ground.<sup>38</sup> On 24<sup>th</sup> January, 1889, St. Helens met Wigan in a rare evening game, 'illuminated by 14 Well's Patent Lights, and spectators [were] able to view the game as if in ordinary daylight'.<sup>39</sup> Whilst the cost of the lamps would have necessitated an increase in the gate receipts and the charging of women for admittance, clubs began to look to its female spectators for increased revenue at regular matches. In 1892, Leeds Cricket, Football and Athletic Club charged ladies 10s 6d. for a full year's membership that would grant them access to the members' stand for its sporting activities.<sup>40</sup> By January 1895, the Yorkshire Senior Competition committee had decided that 'ladies must pay admission to competition matches', something that continued with the formation of the Northern Union in August. For example, women would pay 6s to watch Bradford play Hunslet in the Yorkshire Championship at Park Avenue on October 5<sup>th</sup> but could still gain

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<sup>36</sup> Both quotations from Tony Collins, *Rugby's Great Split*, p.36.

<sup>37</sup> Tony Mason, *Association Football*, p.162.

<sup>38</sup> Advertisements began to stop listing 'Ladies Free'. For example, see *Hull Daily Mail*, 30 March, 1887, p.4; *Hull Daily Mail*, 21 March 1895, p.1; *Bradford Daily Telegraph*, 26 September, 1895, p.1.

<sup>39</sup> Alex Service, *Saints in their Glory: The History of St. Helens Rugby League Club, 1874-1939*, (Rainhill: Self-published, 1985), p.7.

<sup>40</sup> 'Echoes of the Leeds Cricket, Football and Athletic Club', N<sup>o</sup>2, October 1892, p.22, in Phil Caplan & Les Hoole, *Leeds Rugby League Club*, (Brimscombe Port, Tempus Publishing Limited, 1998), p.13.

free admission to A-team (reserve side) games.<sup>41</sup> In 1897, Leeds sold football-only season tickets to women and boys for 3s 6d.<sup>42</sup> However, some clubs did continue to allow women to watch selected games for free, perhaps based on the quality of the opposition and the potential for a good spectacle. When Wigan hosted Rochdale Hornets at Frog Lane on January 15<sup>th</sup>, 1898, Rochdale were struggling in the league as they had done the previous season, so granting women free admission would have potentially bolstered the number of spectators.<sup>43</sup> Conversely, when Wigan met Oldham fourteen days later, admission was charged for all. Oldham were one of the Northern Union's strong teams, having finished second in the Lancashire Senior Competition in 1897 which they would go on to win in 1898. Admission to matches would have deterred many working-class women from attending football, especially married women, who were the managers of the household and relied on the income of their husbands to supply a substantial part of the household budget. Women were expected to ensure that the needs of the entire family were met. When money was short, women would often find work themselves and their wage would be given over to the household budget in its entirety. Whilst it was acceptable for working men to keep something of their wage for his own spending on tobacco, alcohol and leisure such as football spectatorship, women would be expected to forgo any such frivolities and prioritise the family before herself:

In the working-class family familial considerations were of much greater importance than were individualistic ones: the good and the well-being of the family came before the gratification of any individualistic desires.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> *Bradford Daily Telegraph*, 18 January, 1895, p.1; *Bradford Daily Telegraph*, 04 October, 1895, p.1; *Bradford Daily Telegraph*, 26 September, 1895, p.1.

<sup>42</sup> Tony Collins, *Rugby's Great Split*, p.157.

<sup>43</sup> *The Wigan Examiner* (Weekly Edition), 15 January, 1898, p.1.

<sup>44</sup> For a detailed look at family dynamics and the fiscal implications, see Shani D'Cruze, 'Women and the Family' in *Women's History: Britain, 1850-1945, An Introduction*, (ed.) June Purvis, (London: UCL Press

Studies of census data shows that as the nineteenth century became the twentieth, more and more women were undertaking paid employment, especially in the textile factories in the north-west. Deborah Simonton, in her in-depth study of the history of women's work throughout Europe, states that 'before 1914, a pattern emerged which suggested that women would increase as workforce participants almost indefinitely. In [...] Britain numbers grew rapidly'.<sup>45</sup> At first glance the data seems to suggest that women's employment was becoming more accepted as more women became part of the workforce, but this was not the case. Cultural attitudes to expanding employment options remained conservative. During this time, 'women [were] still not perceived as workers. Masculinity [was] bound up with men's work, while femininity [was] still tied to domestic role'.<sup>46</sup> The marriage bar, whereby married women were denied the right to work, alongside the state, was instrumental in encouraging women to see home and family as their natural domain; the growth of maternity facilities, the regulation of child labour, state provision of education, free milk and the promotion of child welfare adding emphasis to the necessity of women remaining at home in order to properly rear the next generation. 'Mothers', says Simonton, 'became even more firmly defined as moral, physical and social guardians'.<sup>47</sup> In 1884, when Bradford began charging women for entrance to the grandstand 'unless they were accompanied by a club member', they were perhaps subtly passing a moral judgment on the propriety of unaccompanied women attending matches, whilst simultaneously taking advantage of the potential increase in

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Limited, 1995), pp.51-84. See also Elizabeth Roberts, *A Woman's Place: An Oral History of Working-Class Women, 1890-1940*, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984) p.34.

<sup>45</sup> Deborah Simonton, *A History of European Women's Work: 1700 to the Present*, (London: Routledge, 1998), p.182.

<sup>46</sup> Deborah Simonton, *A History of European Women's Work*, p.184.

<sup>47</sup> Deborah Simonton, *A History of European Women's Work*, p.189.

the disposable income of single women who were in employment.<sup>48</sup> However, within the working-class rugby community ‘traditions were strong [...] it was simply assumed that all earning children gave their wages to their mother for her to dispose of as she thought best’.<sup>49</sup> Whilst some working children would receive a little pocket money each week, the poorest families would heavily rely on their children’s entire pay packet to provide them with the daily necessities.

Female attendance at rugby matches was waning towards the turn of the century. The formation of the Northern Union in 1895 led to a division of the classes represented at rugby grounds, as the middle-classes turned away from the “unrespectable”, professional code, consolidating the middle-class nature of rugby union crowds. Collins has proposed that this decline in respectability, twinned with football’s repeated assertions of its masculine nature ‘in a society increasingly preoccupied with preparations for, and actual participation in, war’, contributed to the decline in female attendance.<sup>50</sup> But capitalism too, may have played its part. The latter decades of the nineteenth century heralded the commercialisation of sport into a mass spectator entertainment industry. Rutterford and Maltby have discussed how middle-class women were ‘morally as well as socially detached from capitalism’, and while working-class women engaged with capitalism as workers and in the running of the household budget, they too were excluded from the intrinsically male sphere, being held to the higher moral standards

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<sup>48</sup> Tony Collins, *Rugby’s Great Split*, p.36.

<sup>49</sup> Elizabeth Roberts. *A Woman’s Place*, p.110.

<sup>50</sup> Tony Collins, *Rugby’s Great Split*, pp.157-158.

didactically set by their middle-class sisters and thus marginalised by propriety.<sup>51</sup> With the commercialisation of sport came the consolidation of its masculinity, and sport, especially rugby, became ‘a way in which working men could attempt to define themselves and influence the world around them’.<sup>52</sup> As legislation such as the various incarnations of the Married Women’s Property Acts, the inroads made into providing women’s education and, especially during the 1890s, the notion of the “New Woman”, strived together to bring women closer to equality with men, the dynamic of a husband and wife also became more co-active. As Elizabeth Roberts has noted, in working-class families men and women played ‘separate, different, but equal roles’, and in some women even dominated.<sup>53</sup> Football of any code provided men with a “field of one’s own”. For the player, professional sport became the space where working men could garner the respect of his community and gain a degree of social standing that neither factory nor mine could grant him. For the spectator, the rugby ground became a place of refuge, a social space that mirrored the collaborative experience and the camaraderie of the workplace but without the hard graft, accommodating “proper” men only, rejecting all notions of femininity and transgression from the rigid form of masculinity it displayed on its pitches. Rugby, in its commercial, masculine glory, would run into the next century a strong, fit and importantly a *masculine* domain, which it was to remain for many decades to come.

### ‘A Field for their Efforts’: The Origins of Women’s Rugby

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<sup>51</sup> Janette Rutterford & Josephine Maltby, ‘Women and Wealth in Fiction in the Long Nineteenth Century, 1800-1914’ in *Women and their Money 1700-1950: Essays on Women and Finance*, (eds.) Anne Laurence, Josephine Maltby & Janette Rutterford, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2009), p.151.

<sup>52</sup> Tony Collins, *Sport in Capitalist Society*, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), p.54.

<sup>53</sup> Elizabeth Roberts. *A Woman’s Place*, p.116.

It is in vain to say human beings ought to be satisfied with tranquillity: they must have action; and they will make it if they cannot find it. [...] Women are supposed to be very calm generally: but women feel just as men feel; they need exercise for their faculties, and a field for their efforts as much as their brothers do; they suffer from too rigid a restraint, too absolute a stagnation, precisely as men would suffer; and it is narrow-minded in their more privileged fellow-creatures to say that they ought to confine themselves to making puddings and knitting stockings, to playing on the piano and embroidering bags. It is thoughtless to condemn them, or laugh at them, if they seek to do more or learn more than custom has pronounced necessary for their sex.<sup>54</sup>

Written on the eve of rugby's introduction to West Yorkshire, the home of the Brontës, the eponymous Jane Eyre's restlessness and frustration at a women's lot echoes the resentment felt by those Victorian women who suffered at a time when gender roles were becoming more sharply and narrowly defined than at any other period in history. The novel's message is radical: Jane's suggestion that a silent revolt is brewing amongst the minds of women pre-empts the political action that would culminate in the women's suffrage movement later in the nineteenth century. What is most interesting is that Charlotte Brontë employed the language of sport in describing the greater needs of women. Needing "exercise" for their minds and a "field" in which to operate, women are described as needing more "action" in their lives and the men who say otherwise are wrong. But whilst women's mental faculties needed exercise and space, so did women's bodies. One cannot help but wonder what Brontë and her creation Jane would make of women's attempts to find an actual "field for their efforts" in the masculine world of the football codes a few decades later.

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<sup>54</sup> Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, (ed.) Stevie Davies, (London: Penguin, [1847] 2006), p.129-130.



In the concluding decades of the nineteenth century, rugby football was widely considered 'about the most dangerous form of amusement at the present day'.<sup>55</sup> Even small teams, such as Hull Southcoates FC, found themselves paying out compensation to men injured during matches, and in 1886 it recorded paying £3 to this end. The violent brutality of the sport, and the defence of the same, was based on 'the willingness to give and take violence, whether sanctioned by the laws of the game or otherwise, was for rugby the mark of a true man'.<sup>56</sup> So did this assertion of ferocious masculinity exclude Victorian women from playing the game?

Perhaps surprisingly, the answer is no, although such matches were one-offs rather than structured, extended competitions. The first-ever recorded match of women playing rugby in the north of England was on Good Friday, April 8<sup>th</sup>, 1887, at the East End club's ground opposite the Elephant and Castle on Holderness Road, Hull. Given the dominance of rugby in Hull's sporting landscape it is perhaps not surprising that the women of Hull wanted to participate. As one might imagine, in a town that had for so long been dominated by puritan morality, these unknown women players who seemed to threaten the frontier of masculine sport received widespread condemnation from both the Hull and District Rugby Football Union and the local press.<sup>57</sup> "Full Back" in the *Hull Daily Mail* uttered his disgust. Despite the fact that in the previous paragraph he had written, without bias, of the 'busy' Good Friday fixture to be enjoyed by Southcoates and

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<sup>55</sup> *Hull Daily Mail*, 14 June, 1886, p.4.

<sup>56</sup> Tony Collins, *A Social History of English Rugby Union*, p.74.

<sup>57</sup> *Hull Daily Mail*, 06 April, 1887, p.2; *Hull Daily Mail*, 07 April, 1887, p.3.

East End, he used mention of the advertised women's game to vent his distaste at the playing of sport on the Christian holy day. But whilst sport on such a holy day was deemed distasteful enough, this particular match went further in pushing the boundaries of Victorian decency and was considered 'a low and demoralizing affair'. In bracketed punctuation Full Back questioned the women's decency and social status: 'A match has been advertised [...] between two teams of ladies (?) – ladies of the ballet'.<sup>58</sup> He heaped scorn on the East End club for allowing the match to take place on their pitch and he urged the 'football-loving public of Hull to withhold their support for a match that will only tend to bring the noble game into disrepute'.<sup>59</sup> Whether he had an opinion on the potential disrepute that could be heaped on the "noble" middle-class ballet world by its members playing such a rough, unladylike sport in the depths of industrial east Hull remains unknown. The players' names have not been documented (one would hope at least one was named Jane) and little is known about the match itself, but in spite of Full Back's boycott call, many did attend the match. However, when 'spectators broke into the playing area' the women's display was unceremoniously halted.<sup>60</sup>

Over the past decade, ten-year-old Emily Valentine has emerged as the semi-official first female rugby player, and is credited as such at the World Rugby Museum at Twickenham.<sup>61</sup> Sports historians have traditionally been very concerned with the discovery of the origins of sports leading to the creation of several origin myths and the desire to identify "firsts". Emily's story can be compared to the myth that William Webb

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<sup>58</sup> *Hull Daily Mail*, 06 April 1887, p.2.

<sup>59</sup> *Hull Daily Mail*, 06 April 1887, p.2.

<sup>60</sup> *Hull Daily Mail*, 01 October, 1908, p.6.

<sup>61</sup> Museum of World Rugby permanent exhibition, September 2010.

Ellis was the first male player, who invented the sport by “picking up the ball and running with it”. As Emily is a child, her story avoids dealing with the complex intersectional issues of gender and sexuality that adult women playing rugby give rise to, and her social class also approximates with *Tom Brown Schooldays*’ portrayal of the young Tom Brown embodying the middle-class values of rugby.

In the same year as the ladies took to the pitch in Hull, Emily Valentine, a ten-year-old girl in Enniskillen, Northern Ireland, was convincing her two brothers and their friends to let her play rugby with them at Portoria Royal School, where their father was a teacher of classics and assistant headmaster. The school refused to let the newly-reformed rugby team play on its main field, but nevertheless the team played intra-school matches on Saturdays.<sup>62</sup> Written fifty years later, Emily’s memoirs describe her love of rugby football and her lament that she ‘seldom got a chance to do more than kick a place kick or a drop kick’ and that despite being hampered by ‘petticoats and thick undergarments’ she ‘*could* run’.<sup>63</sup> Whilst she stood loyally on the touchline watching the team, she longed ‘to play in a real rugby game and score a try’.<sup>64</sup> One day, Emily got her chance when the team were a “man” short in a school ‘scratch match’. ‘I plagued them to let me play’, she wrote. When the boys relented, she threw off her ‘overcoat and hat’ and, as she ‘always wore boys’ boots anyhow’ she was ready to compete.<sup>65</sup> The experience left such an impression, that at the time of writing, Emily could ‘still feel the leathery smell’ of the ball as she ran

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<sup>62</sup> ‘The Remarkable Emily Valentine’, *Scrumqueens*. 17 January, 2010. Available: <http://www.scrumqueens.com/blogs/anonymous/remarkable-emily-valentine> [Accessed: 04 December, 2013]. Research credit given in main body of text to John Birch.

<sup>63</sup> Museum of World Rugby permanent exhibition, *Extract from the Memoirs of Emily Galwey*, September 2010. Emphasis in original.

<sup>64</sup> Museum of World Rugby permanent exhibition, *Extract from the Memoirs of Emily Galwey*.

<sup>65</sup> Museum of World Rugby permanent exhibition, *Extract from the Memoirs of Emily Galwey*.

with it in her hands as she recalled the heroic moment she realised her ambition – to score that precious try:

I grasped it and ran dodging, darting, but I was so keen to score that try that I did not pass it, perhaps when I should; I still raced on, I could see the boy coming towards me; I dodged, yes I could and breathless, with my heart thumping, my knees shaking bit, I ran. Yes, I had done it; one last spurt and I touched down, right on the line. I had scored my try. I lay flat on my face and for a moment everything went black. I scrambled up, gave a hasty rub down to my knees. A ragged cheer went up from the spectators. I grinned at my brothers. It was all I had hoped for. I knew I couldn't kick a goal, but that didn't worry or disappoint me; what I'd wanted I'd had; the desperate run, the successful dodging, and the touch down.<sup>66</sup>

John Birch, who uncovered the story of Emily's childhood exploits, claimed that Portoria Royal School's records alongside letters Emily sent to them in 1951, suggested that she played in more than one game, including 'some of the external games' and that 'several sources say at times that the entire three-quarter line was made up of Valentines, including Emily', although he has not documented these sources.<sup>67</sup> Emily's father left the school in 1891 and as a result Emily's school rugby career came to an end.<sup>68</sup>



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<sup>66</sup> Museum of World Rugby permanent exhibition, *Extract from the Memoirs of Emily Galwey*.

<sup>67</sup> 'The Remarkable Emily Valentine', *Scrumqueens*.

<sup>68</sup> 'The Remarkable Emily Valentine', *Scrumqueens*.

**Figure 2:** Portrait of Emily Valentine.<sup>69</sup>

For a daughter from a middle-class family, Emily certainly had much more freedom than would have been expected for a young girl of this time, especially the daughter of a schoolmaster whose profession involved discipline. Middle-class children generally had fewer freedoms than their lower-class counterparts, as Harry Hendrick has discussed in his work on the history of childhood. He states that in the latter nineteenth century

the higher up the social scale the more parents controlled their children, in particular through defining what was forbidden [...]. The main areas of discipline involved “keeping up appearances” and “respectability”, household duties, behaviour at mealtimes and control of play and of playmates. There is no doubt about the extent of parental demands for obedience.<sup>70</sup>

Children were ‘usually viewed from the perspective of becoming (growing to adult maturity), rather than being (children as their own persons)’ so Emily would have been expected to behave as a “lady-in-training” from a very early age, embodying the femininity required of a woman of her social class.<sup>71</sup> For a society preoccupied with gendered behaviour, it is also unusual to read that middle-class Emily would romp around with her brothers wearing boys’ boots, something far more likely within families much lower down the social scale. So, just what was going on in the Valentine family that gave Emily the freedom from her sex to break with societal norms and enable her to play with the boys in such an unfeminine manner? One clue lies in the culture of Portoria Royal

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<sup>69</sup> Catherine Galwey, *Emily Valentine*. [Photograph]. Available: <http://edition.cnn.com/2016/06/23/sport/emily-valentine-first-lady-of-rugby/index.html> [Accessed: 04 December, 2013].

<sup>70</sup> Harry Hendrick, *Children, Childhood and English Society, 1880-1990*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp.22.

<sup>71</sup> Harry Hendrick, *Children, Childhood and English Society*, pp.3-4.

School during the 1880s. The school itself was referred to as “the Eton of Ireland”, but during the time Emily’s father was there Portoria Royal was suffering from some difficulties, when Frederick, the son of the headmaster, William Steele, was drowned in a boating accident. Steele struggled to recover from the personal tragedy and left the school largely in the care of William Valentine. As the student numbers ‘seriously declined: 18 dayboys and no boarders [...] the discipline of the boys also declined and the internal structure of the school started to show signs of neglect’.<sup>72</sup> Emily’s brothers attended the school and the Valentine family lived on Willoughby Place, just outside the school grounds. One can surmise that the unruly influence of the school on Emily’s brothers would have also influenced Emily herself. Despite their social class, the family would also have suffered from restrictions to their household budget, as the drop in student numbers resulted in the reduction of the annual allowance for assistant masters like Emily’s father. Perhaps this explains why she would be wearing boys’ boots: it is possible that the family finances so stretched that was forced to wear hand-me-downs from her brothers.<sup>73</sup> Nevertheless, any temporary poverty did not hinder the children’s prospects; Emily married into the officer class and lived temporarily in India with her husband, Major John Galwey OBE, whilst her brothers continued their education at Trinity College, Dublin.<sup>74</sup>

As women’s rugby union becomes increasingly popular today, Emily’s story would appear to be becoming a foundational creation myth of women’s involvement in rugby union, in the vein of the Webb Ellis story. It has similar qualities in that there is hearsay

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<sup>72</sup> Portoria Royal School, *History of Portoria Royal School*. Available: [http://www.portoraroyal.co.uk/History\\_of\\_School.aspx](http://www.portoraroyal.co.uk/History_of_School.aspx) [Accessed 04 December, 2013].

<sup>73</sup> Portoria Royal School, *History of Portoria Royal School*.

<sup>74</sup> ‘The Remarkable Emily Valentine’, *Scrumqueens*.

evidence without any formal proof being available in the public domain. The origins of the women's involvement in the sport appear to be ascribed to a single individual, whereas it is more likely that there were women and girls, individuals or groups, before her that had played some form of handling code, either briefly between themselves, or with men, before her. Emily, the sweet-faced girl that looks on from her portrait, however, is the ideal "first", as she is the embodiment of how rugby union sees itself; she has the moral innocence of youth combined with an archetypal middle-class background, in contrast to the more working-class women who played in East Hull in 1887. As with all sports' foundational myths, the process involves the sport projecting an idealised image by holding up a mirror to itself and reflecting it back into the past, and Emily's pretty portrait, free from the complications of adult female sexuality, twinned with her upstanding middle-class childhood, is the ideal image from which to legitimise modern women playing the game.

### Moving the Goalposts

However, it is highly unlikely that Emily Valentine or the East Hull women were the first women to play rugby. Press reports of "football" in the 1880s make it difficult to know which code was being played. This difficulty is highlighted when we look at the earliest reports of women playing football in 1881 and are useful in showing the complexity of issues that faced women who wanted to play football of any code. Six years before she scored her try, two teams of women playing soccer under the names of Scotland and England met on the pitch in Edinburgh on May 7<sup>th</sup>, 1881, beginning the game with none of the urgency embodied by Emily Valentine. The *Edinburgh Evening News* reported that when the match commenced at Hibernian Park 'there was an

appearance of bashfulness and hesitancy about the ladies'.<sup>75</sup> The style of play drew much criticism and the footballing prowess of the women was disparaged as 'poor', but as they had 'only been in training about a fortnight' most considered this in line with expectations.<sup>76</sup> 'It was not long', remarked one reporter, 'ere any novice could have decided that the "ladies" knew actually nothing of the game'.<sup>77</sup> Rather than being taken seriously as a sporting contest, the game was widely viewed as a novelty meant to 'amuse' and the 'general feeling was [...] to make fun of the match'.<sup>78</sup> The uniqueness of the game led the attendance figure of approximately 1500-2000 to disappoint some: 'the number of spectators was good for an ordinary match, but a larger number might have been expected to turn out to witness such an unusual spectacle'.<sup>79</sup> The dubiousness of their description as "'international teams'" and status as "'ladies'" was frequently asserted with the use of inverted commas within newspaper articles, with the latter serving to highlight the impropriety of women playing soccer.<sup>80</sup> The match was considered a 'very unfeminine display' and the *Fife Herald* was outraged: '[we] must, in the interest of public morals, protest against the institution of an exhibition which can hardly be called decent'.<sup>81</sup> It was not only the press who were judgmental. Many spectators present were said to be 'pretty free with their criticisms, not only of the play, but of the appearance and behaviour of the players'.<sup>82</sup> Newspaper reports also emphasised the attire of the players, noting their 'charming and effective' feminine costumes that showed off their

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<sup>75</sup> *Southern Reporter*, 12 May, 1881, p.4; *Edinburgh Evening News*, 09 May, 1881, p.3.

<sup>76</sup> *Edinburgh Evening News*, 09 May, 1881, p.3

<sup>77</sup> *Fife Herald*, 12 May, 1881, p.4.

<sup>78</sup> *Dundee Evening Telegraph*, 17 May, 1881, p.2; *Edinburgh Evening News*, 09 May, 1881, p.3.

<sup>79</sup> *Edinburgh Evening News*, 09 May, 1881, p.3.

<sup>80</sup> *Dundee Evening Telegraph*, 17 May, 1881, p.2; *Edinburgh Evening News*, 23 May, 1881, p.3.

<sup>81</sup> *Southern Reporter*, 12 May, 1881, p.4; *Fife Herald*, 12 May, 1881, p.4.

<sup>82</sup> *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 14 May, 1881, p.11.



‘excellent physique[s]’ of the young women who ‘had the appearance of ballet dancers’.<sup>83</sup> Some players emphasised their femininity, ‘[retaining such] ornaments as frilling, bracelets, &c.’, whilst some women ‘with arms bare to the shoulder, entered into the game with all the enthusiasm of boys’.<sup>84</sup> For one reporter, the opportunity to gaze upon the ‘picturesqueness of the costumes and the youth of the players’ was ‘the only redeeming feature’ of the match.<sup>85</sup>

A second match nine days later at Shawfield Park, Glasgow, was also not well-received. Four hundred spectators paid a shilling to watch the ‘exhibition’ from kick off, but trouble began after approximately thirty minutes’ play, when a large crowd of local people evaded police efforts to keep them back and broke through the gates.<sup>86</sup> Scuffles between police and the crowd ensued, and the rowdiness of the spectators increased, as they ‘booed, hissed, and laughed alternately’, until on fifty-five minutes, the ropes at the side of the pitch were cut and the players were surrounded.<sup>87</sup> The women were subjected to ‘somewhat rough treatment’ and ‘rowdiness of very brutal description’, and two of them fainted as a result.<sup>88</sup> The *Dundee Courier* was highly critical, declaring ‘it will not do for a mob of men to constitute themselves into conservators of public decency in that fashion’. However, the paper was resolute in the opinion that equal blame must be borne by the players themselves:

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<sup>83</sup> *Edinburgh Evening News*, 09 May, 1881, p.3; *Liverpool Mercury*, 10 May 1881, p.5.

<sup>84</sup> *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 14 May, 1881, p.11.

<sup>85</sup> *Southern Reporter*, 12 May, 1881, p.4.

<sup>86</sup> *Dundee Evening Telegraph*, 17 May, 1881, p.2

<sup>87</sup> *Dundee Evening Telegraph*, 17 May, 1881, p.2

<sup>88</sup> *Dundee Evening Telegraph*, 17 May, 1881, p.2; *Edinburgh Evening News*, 17 May, 1881, p.2.

At the same time, it is to be hoped that the doctrine of women's rights is not to be recognised as including the right to appear in public places in knickerbocker suits for the purposes of playing football or for any purpose whatever. The unsuitability of the game to women, in every way, for all reasons, is sufficiently obvious. A football match by women may be an odd spectacle, but it is very difficult to believe that it can be a decent one. On account of its obviously objectionable character, it out to be suppressed – not by roughs, by the police.<sup>89</sup>

Only one anonymous columnist came to the defence of the women players over the crowd's behaviour, deeming the match 'perfectly unobjectionable' whilst 'little is to be said for the taste of those who bestow on a football match a condemnation they do not give to the ballet-dancing in a pantomime'.<sup>90</sup> Only one English newspaper considered that the purpose of the matches might be to 'popularise football as a feminine pastime', but it too, along with the Scottish publications, considered the players 'pecuniarily benefitting' from the financial reward of a match 'evidently got up to draw the shillings of the crowd' as motivation.<sup>91</sup> The lack of preparation suggests that the women were not looking to seriously advance "football as a feminine pastime", and women themselves stayed away from the games. 'The absence of the fair sex was specially noticeable' in Glasgow, and it was considered 'to the credit of the softer sex [that] they were conspicuous by their absence' from Edinburgh too.<sup>92</sup> Thus, the women's display was defined by the male sporting spectator gaze, and the hasty putting together of the events, along with the several comparisons to ballet, suggest that the matches were considered along the same lines of music hall and performative shows, rather than sport, intended to be fun and

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<sup>89</sup> *Dundee Courier*, 18 May, 1881. p.2.

<sup>90</sup> *Edinburgh Evening News*, 17 May, 1881, p.2.

<sup>91</sup> *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 14 May, 1881, p.11; *Fife Herald*, 12 May, 1881, p.4.

<sup>92</sup> *Nottingham Evening Post*, 17 May, 1881, p.3; *Southern Reporter*, 12 May, 1881, p.4.

draw in a predominantly male crowd willing to pay to be entertained by a 'scandalous exhibition'.<sup>93</sup>

Again, the concept of gazing is an interesting one in the context of early women's soccer. Mulvey argues that one way humans derive pleasure from looking is 'developed through narcissism and the constitution of the ego [and] comes from identification with the image seen [...] the spectator's fascination with and recognition with his like'.<sup>94</sup> In terms of these matches, the masculine narrative of what constitutes good football and women's "proper" behaviour once again controls the gaze. The gaze is 'attached to an idealisation': the masculine gaze does not see its masculinity reflected back at itself in terms of masculine men playing "good football" and therefore has no connection with what is being displayed.<sup>95</sup> Women, whose gaze as we have seen is also controlled by the masculine narrative, also see no connection to themselves. The women playing soccer bear no resemblance to themselves, or to the cultural expectations of womanly behaviour. As neither men nor women have a connection to what is being displayed, the novelty-factor of women's soccer as an abomination, something not to be taken seriously, is reinforced. References to the physique and appearance of the players, with their "arms bare to the shoulder", evidence the fantasy element of the sexualised male gaze that places women in a 'traditional exhibitionist role' where 'women are simultaneously looked at and displayed': in women's soccer 'woman displayed as sexual object is the leitmotif of erotic spectacle' in sporting form.<sup>96</sup> One more attempt to play in Scotland was

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<sup>93</sup> Quoted in *Dundee Evening Telegraph*, 17 May, 1881, p.2.

<sup>94</sup> Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure', p.10.

<sup>95</sup> Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure', p.10.

<sup>96</sup> Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure', p.11.

arranged in Kilmarnock, but ‘on the recommendation of the magistrates the club who had granted the use of their ground for the match withdrew their permission’ and the idea was abandoned.<sup>97</sup>

One of the problems of identifying women playing rugby is the synonymy of the term “football” with the various kicking and handling codes. In Britain, association football, rugby union football and Northern Union (rugby league) football were referred to simply as football throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, but many historians make the anachronistic assumption that mentions of football during this period means soccer as it does in modern parlance. Moreover, the differences between the two codes were not as clear as they would become later. Once the “lady footballers” had been denied a game in Kilmarnock it appears that they travelled south of the border into England. On 21<sup>st</sup> May, the ‘novel contest’ entertained approximately 4000 spectators in Blackburn, but their scheduled match on 28<sup>th</sup> May in Liverpool resulted in a no-show by the teams. On June 25<sup>th</sup> the women were making a ‘return visit’ to Liverpool, playing two matches over three days at the Cattle Market Inn Athletic Grounds in the Stanley district of the city.<sup>98</sup> The first game attracted ‘only a small attendance’, which was accounted for the previous failure of the teams to turn up, but another factor may be that at this time Liverpool was a hotbed of rugby; soccer had not yet taken hold of the city as the premier code.<sup>99</sup> The first game is a curious one in this regard, as the *Liverpool Mercury* records that the Scottish team dominated first-half play and ‘succeeded in making several

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<sup>97</sup> *Edinburgh Evening News*, 18 May, 1881, p.4.

<sup>98</sup> *Edinburgh Evening News*, 23 May 1881, p.3; *Liverpool Mercury*, 25 June, 1881, p.1.

<sup>99</sup> *Liverpool Mercury*, 27 June, 1881, p.7.

touchdowns and one goal'.<sup>100</sup> Further "touchdowns" and "goals" were made in the second-half and the Scotch team won the game. That the language of the handling code is used is undisputable: the noun 'touchdown' (or touch-down) has been used commonly in rugby footballing terms since the 1860s to denote 'the act of touching the ground with the ball behind the goal-line, usually that of the opposing side, to score points'.<sup>101</sup> However, without further evidence one ought to be circumspect as to whether the women were playing according to rugby union rules; it is highly possible that rather than playing one code or another that the game was a hybrid of sorts, perhaps a game of soccer with some form of try incorporated, given the familiarity of the handling code to the local populace. Such accounts at first may seem illuminating, but given the correct historical context they can also present the historian with more questions in the place of definitive answers. In this instance we are presented with an example of how problematic it is to define "football" at this time. The second match 'attracted a larger number of spectators' and the reporting of it by the *Liverpool Mercury* was devoid of moralising or scorn, merely recalling that 'players on both sides [were] encouraged and rewarded by cheers which greeted any good "hits"', suggestive of the Liverpool audience appreciating the women's efforts much more than previous spectators.<sup>102</sup> However, there is no mention of the "touchdown" remaining part of the women's play.

Despite the assertions that both rugby and association football codes were essentially masculine, there were some contradictions in the gendered nature of the

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<sup>100</sup> *Liverpool Mercury*, 27 June, 1881, p.7.

<sup>101</sup> "touchdown, n.", *OED Online*, Oxford University Press. Available: <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/203884?rskey=9THhIU&result=2> [Accessed: 09 December, 2013].

<sup>102</sup> *Liverpool Mercury*, 28 June, 1881, p.6.

comparisons. On March 6th, 1882, Blackburn Rovers took on Sheffield Wednesday in an association game at Fartown, Huddersfield, a staunch rugby town. One reporter noted that

on all hands remarks were to be heard in praise of the Association game in preference to the Rugby game, the former being prettier, manlier, more scientific, and easier for bystanders to follow, besides being unattended with so much danger to life and limb.<sup>103</sup>

One of the most significant features of the late-nineteenth century was the position of science within popular culture. Science, another predominantly masculine sphere, became an increasingly specialized field over the course of the nineteenth century and many contemporary periodicals would publish scientific articles alongside fiction and essays, bringing scientific endeavour to the forefront of public consciousness.<sup>104</sup> Increased scientific activity and taxonomic study meant that by the late nineteenth century a ‘powerful conceptual reorganization of the knowable world’ had occurred.<sup>105</sup> Science was unravelling the mysteries of the world through the process of classification, and there was beauty in the order it created. Science was systematic, precise and logical, and in soccer terms passing the ball was considered scientific. When soccer is deemed “manlier” and “more scientific” than the rugby code, the argument aligns the latter with disorder, chaos and degeneracy; rugby was elemental, more animal in its physicality and perhaps even more dangerously, towards the feminine. However, in spite of these assertions, the match had no bearing on the town’s attitude to sport. Huddersfield remained loyal to the

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<sup>103</sup> *The Huddersfield Daily Chronicle*, 07 March, 1882, p.3.

<sup>104</sup> Victoria Samantha Dawson, “‘Gay Motes that People the Sunbeams’: Dust Death and Degeneration in ‘Dracula’ in *Bram Stoker and the Gothic: Formations to Transformations*, (ed.) Catherine Wynne, (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2016), p.106.

<sup>105</sup> John Kucich, ‘Scientific Ascendancy’ in *A Companion to the Victorian Novel*, (eds.) Patrick Brantlinger, & William B. Thesing, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2002), pp.119.

handling code and it would be a quarter of a century before the formation of its professional association team, Huddersfield Town AFC.

Whilst some ranked soccer or rugby higher on the masculinity scale than the other, football of either code remained overwhelmingly a male pastime. In 1884 the *Yorkshire Gazette* remarked with an air of lamentation that ‘Englishmen are proverbially fond of field sports, but we have few in which ladies can take part with convenience or enjoyment’.<sup>106</sup> It was unusual in that it deemed soccer to be ‘not entirely out of the question for ladies, seeing that the game has been played in Scotland by women’, but did concede that it was ‘scarcely a game likely to be popular with the fair sex’.<sup>107</sup> When it came to that other quintessential English pastime, cricket, it supposed the game to require ‘a little more strength, nerve and quickness of the eye than ladies are supposed to possess’, but nevertheless saw ‘no good reason why a modified form of the national game should not be played by ladies’.<sup>108</sup> Lawn tennis, it surmised, ‘hits a happy medium’ bringing together outdoor air and activity of mind and body and it saw ‘no valid reason why the male sex should have a monopoly of the bat and ball’.<sup>109</sup> Interestingly, the paper separated rugby from soccer in terms of female participation: ‘although one or two female fifteens have been organised, [rugby] is likely to remain the exclusive pastime of the sterner half of humanity’.<sup>110</sup> Rugby football was still considered ‘about the most

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<sup>106</sup> *Yorkshire Gazette*, 12 August, 1884, p.4.

<sup>107</sup> *Yorkshire Gazette*, 12 August, 1884, p.4.

<sup>108</sup> *Yorkshire Gazette*, 12 August, 1884, p.4; *Yorkshire Gazette*, 30 August, 1884, p.12.

<sup>109</sup> *Yorkshire Gazette*, 12 August, 1884, p.4; *Yorkshire Gazette*, 30 August, 1884, p.12.

<sup>110</sup> *Yorkshire Gazette*, 30 August, 1884, p.12; Charles Walter Masters, *Rugby, Football and the Working Classes in Victorian and Edwardian York (Borthwick Paper N<sup>o</sup> 123 and 124)*, (York: University of York, 2014), p.41.

dangerous form of enjoyment at the present day' and therefore completely unsuitable for women.<sup>111</sup>

Barrister and journalist Ernest Belfort Bax, writing in 1887, surmised that the idea of women's frailty was a myth perpetuated by the British class structure. He attacked the middle-class notion that because woman is 'muscularly "frail"' then she must also be 'constitutionally "frail"'.<sup>112</sup> For Bax, this was 'the chief form of female privilege' afforded to the middle-classes, who were 'brought up' to regard themselves as frail because they were constantly being reminded of their limits. 'Among the proletariat where these fancies are an unattainable luxury' he declared, 'the equality of health and staying-power between men and women is much more obvious'.<sup>113</sup> For Bax, strength and stamina was a class issue, yet gendered notions of the "frailty" of women remained pervasive in the discourse of sport and wider Victorian culture.<sup>114</sup> Bax, therefore, is by no means representative, but it is curious to note that there were arguments for women's physical strengths. On face value this would appear to be a feminist argument, however, despite being a socialist, Bax was a staunchly anti-feminist, men's rights advocate and had a sharp axe to grind. He became more vehement with age, eventually writing *The Fraud of Feminism* in 1913 with the aim of 'furnishing a succinct exposure of the pretensions of the Modern Feminist Movement'.<sup>115</sup> The cultural belief in the frailty of middle-class women clearly framed the discourse of women's participation in and spectatorship of sport.

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<sup>111</sup> *Hull Daily Mail*, 14 June, 1886, p.4.

<sup>112</sup> Ernest Belfort Bax 'Some Heterodox Notes on the Women Question' in *To-Day*, (July 1887), pp.24-32.

<sup>113</sup> Ernest Belfort Bax 'Some Heterodox Notes on the Women Question', pp.24-32.

<sup>114</sup> Ernest Belfort Bax 'Some Heterodox Notes on the Women Question', pp.24-32.

<sup>115</sup> Ernest Belfort Bax *The Fraud of Feminism*, (London: Grant Richards Ltd., 1913), p.1.



The obstacles to women playing rugby were exacerbated by the fact that the game was perceived as being more masculine and more violent than soccer. The difficulties in women playing rugby were magnified by rugby's status as the "most dangerous" sport. As David Rubinstein has documented, the value of women taking part in physical activity was referenced in terms of making women better mothers, which was incompatible the perilous nature of rugby.<sup>116</sup> For the middle-classes, the mid-1880s heralded 'the new athletic age in English girlhood' where

heels have given place to long-distance walking shoes. From mild croquet and lawn tennis we have gone on to cricket, boating, and swimming, ay, and even up in the North there is a ladies' school where they go in for football.<sup>117</sup>

No further reference has so far been found to the name and location of this school, but it is almost certainly unique if it did allow its students to partake in football of any code. It was 1895 before middle-class women did make another attempt to begin playing soccer, under the name British Ladies' Football Club. The players were aged fourteen to twenty-eight and included 'four or five married ladies who are regular players'.<sup>118</sup> The club's founder, Nettie Honeyball, established the club 'with the fixed resolve of proving to the world that women are not the "ornamental and useless" creatures that men have pictured'.<sup>119</sup> Honeyball was also its secretary, and asked the *Westminster Gazette* 'why shouldn't ladies play football as well as men?', whilst reassuring her interviewer of the women's femininity: 'we are all homely girls [...] no bad temper is ever displayed, and I

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<sup>116</sup> David Rubinstein, *Before The Suffragettes: Women's Emancipation in the 1890s*, (Brighton: The Harvester Press, 1996), p.220. See also Jennifer Hargreaves, *Sporting Females: Critical Issues on the History and Sociology of Women's Sports*, (London: Routledge, 1994), esp. chapter three, pp.42-62.

<sup>117</sup> *Halifax Courier*, 12 October, 1889, p.3.

<sup>118</sup> *Yorkshire Evening Post*, 31 January, 1895, p.4.

<sup>119</sup> *The Sketch*, 06 February 1895, p.60.

have never heard a cross word spoken'.<sup>120</sup> Honeyball hoped that the team would improve to the standard whereby they could 'oppose some weak male teams before long', asserting the idea of even well-practised women's subservience to men in a physical and technical football capacity.<sup>121</sup>

The complexity of the gender issues women faced if attempting to play rugby league is perhaps best demonstrated by the experiences of the British Ladies' Football Club, which would have served as a deterrent for any woman wanting to play the sport. The club's president, Lady Florence Dixie, came from a sporting family: she was the daughter of Archibald Douglas, a cricketer for Marylebone Cricket Club and the eighth Marquess of Queensbury, and her brother, John Douglas, the ninth Marquess of Queensbury, was the man who endorsed the rules that lay the foundation of modern boxing.<sup>122</sup> For the British Ladies' Football Team, the playing of rugby was never entertained: soccer was the only code for women, she told *The Pall Mall Gazette*:

I cannot conceive a game more calculated to improve the physique of women than that of football. I refer, of course, to the Association game, which to my mind is the only legitimate representation of this most excellent sport, for I have never been able to see any justification for the word football as applied to the Rugby method of play, which would be better represented by the appellation "harum-scarum scrummage".<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> *Yorkshire Evening Post*, 31 January, 1895, p.4.

<sup>121</sup> *Yorkshire Evening Post*, 31 January, 1895, p.4.

<sup>122</sup> John Douglas, ninth Marquess of Queensbury, was the father of Lord Alfred Douglas, known as "Bosie", a lover of Oscar Wilde. Wilde's libel case against John Douglas led to Wilde's arrest on charges of sodomy and gross indecency in the infamous trial *Regina v Wilde*. Wilde and Lord Alfred were sentenced to two years' hard labour on 25 May, 1895. See Richard Ellmann, *Oscar Wilde*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1988), esp. chapters 17 and 18, pp. 409-449.

<sup>123</sup> *The Pall Mall Gazette*, 08 February, 1895, p.10.

Dixie saw football as a means of women attaining bodily perfection, an 'improved physique which will not only improve their appearance but their health as well' whilst presenting 'a symmetrical whole'.<sup>124</sup> The beauty of symmetry was a cultural ideal that had disseminated from the ancient Greek tradition, and was considered 'the first character of beauty in thinking beings'.<sup>125</sup> However, for the later Victorians, more emphasis was placed on a healthy, attractive body than on the attainment of a pretty face, for, as the instructive manual *Beauty and How to Keep It* opined, 'a pretty figure is really a much more valuable gift than a pretty face as it lasts so much longer'.<sup>126</sup> Unlike modern thinking of strength and leanness equating to "good health", 'the Victorians interpreted relative fleshiness as evidence of health' for both men and women and instructional books stressed the relationship between physical activity and beauty.<sup>127</sup> Estelle d' Aubigny, in *The Woman Beautiful in the Twentieth Century* (1902), reflected that all women could become beautiful: 'a symmetrical figure, a graceful carriage, a well-poised head – these are what count [...] healthy exercise is undoubtedly the real cause and secret of this increase of good looks'.<sup>128</sup> However, one must not exaggerate the influence of physical activity upon prevailing cultural definitions of beauty towards the turn of the century; whilst some believed that it should have an influence it was not until much later that this notion was widely accepted.

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<sup>124</sup> *The Pall Mall Gazette*, 08 February, 1895, p.10.

<sup>125</sup> A. Walker, *Beauty: Illustrated Chiefly by an Analysis and Classification of Beauty in Women*, (London: Effingham Wilson, 1836), quoted in Sharon Romm, 'The Changing Face of Beauty' in *Aesthetic Plastic Surgery*, Vol.13, Issue 2 (1989), p.94.

<sup>126</sup> "A Professional Beauty", *Beauty and How to Keep It*, (London: Brentano's, 1889), quoted in Sharon Romm, 'The Changing Face of Beauty' in *Aesthetic Plastic Surgery*, Vol.13, Issue 2 (1989), p.95.

<sup>127</sup> Valerie Steele, *Fashion and Eroticism: Ideals of Feminine Beauty from the Victorian Era to the Jazz Age*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), p.91.

<sup>128</sup> Estelle D'Aubigny, *The Woman Beautiful in the Twentieth Century*, (London: Street and Smith Publishers, 1902), pp.9-10

Despite Dixie's assertions as to the health benefits women could gain by playing soccer, there was opposition to women playing the sport on health grounds. Four days before "The Lady Footballers" played in Sheffield, the *Sheffield Evening Telegraph* highlighted some of the dangers to their female readers in their "Ladies' Corner". It opined that a 'common-sense review' would find women's 'equality with men in all sports' an 'impossibility' and offered two main health-related reasons for this view.<sup>129</sup> Not only did women face 'danger of collision with other players and consequent injury which may result in life-long agony' but also 'another and equally serious difficulty to overcome [...] the effects of exhaustion'.<sup>130</sup> The paper described how, at the end of the first public match 'one of the lady players was spitting blood – the result of the strain upon her physical resources'. Such a physical action, unfeminine and vulgar in nature, the writer declared, 'ought to have led to a ban being placed upon such exhibitions'. Women were just not physically strong enough to cope and the effects of football on the body were dangerous and unsightly.

Opposition to the British Ladies' Football Club was voluble, and often based on gendered concepts of the male gaze. One excellent example is in the form of a long letter to the *Pall Mall Gazette* written under the pseudonym "No Goal" made very clear what the problem was: women playing soccer were just not attractive to men. The language it employs is subtle but deliberate and it is worth analysing in detail. For the correspondent, women's small feet were something to be proud of and with a hint of eroticism he declared

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<sup>129</sup> *Sheffield Evening Telegraph*, 02 May, 1895, p.2.

<sup>130</sup> *Sheffield Evening Telegraph*, 02 May, 1895, p.2.

I dearly love to see her feet come peeping in and out of her skirts,  
as the poet says, “like little mice” (delicious smile!) but I should  
groan to see those same little feet applied with force to a horrid  
football.<sup>131</sup>

It was no coincidence that the writer used the reference to Sir John Suckling to aid his defence in his quote from the poem ‘A Ballad Upon A Wedding’ of c.1638, in which the writer betrays his own ideology that women should primarily be *seen* by men. The poem blazons the innocent beauty of a middle-class bride with an undertone that hints at her sexual attractiveness: ‘No grape, that’s kindly ripe, could be/ So round, so plump, so soft as she,/ Nor half so full of juice’.<sup>132</sup> It also evokes a womanliness becoming less familiar in the late-nineteenth century, as the letter-writer laments, ‘the True Woman is being rapidly forced under by the New Woman’.<sup>133</sup> The True Woman knows how to behave, and that she must be attractive but not immodest, submitting to the male gaze that will find desire in the innocent glimpses of the attributes that are unmistakably feminine, such as the small feet of Suckling’s bride. The writer pleads ‘for the love of heaven stay them from making sights of themselves on the football field’ for women playing football does not acquiesce to the male gaze:

I think that the aspect of two lovely girls, flushed and mud-  
bespattered, causing their rounded shoulders to collide ever and  
anon with brutal force, would be a deplorable one.<sup>134</sup>

The bride of Suckling’s poem displays the ideal of public feminine behaviour, unlike the women footballers. Women playing soccer is ‘so foreign to the poetry of life – if poetry can be said to exist when an educated and refined lady [Dixie] urges her sisters to don men’s attire and play men’s games’. Not only is the sport advocating the destabilisation of

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<sup>131</sup> *The Pall Mall Gazette*, 23 February, 1895, p.9.

<sup>132</sup> Sir John Suckling, ‘A Ballad Upon A Wedding’ (c.1638) in *The Works of John Suckling in Prose and Verse*, (ed.) A. H. Thompson, (London: George Routledge and Sons, Limited, 1910), pp.29-32, l.34-36.

<sup>133</sup> *The Pall Mall Gazette*, 23 February, 1895, p.9.

<sup>134</sup> *The Pall Mall Gazette*, 23 February, 1895, p.9.

the gender boundary in physical and fashion terms, but the fact their matches take place in public undermines the respectability of the women involved. Propriety dictates that the physical nature of women ought to remain inside the bedroom and be witnessed only by her husband during intercourse. The writer iterates that the middle-class women's public displays of physicality are inappropriate and not attractive to men of their social standing:

The soft, delicate beauty of a young girl is enhanced, perhaps, by a ball dress, glittering lights, bright colours, and the languorous intoxication of a Strauss waltz; but show me the halo surrounding the same girl when she emerges in her football rig on a dirty field, to play to the music of a referee's whistle and the hoarse acclamations of a beery crowd!

The women footballers are no longer the angelic, graceful sex as they give themselves over to the unrespectable gaze of the badly-behaved, working-class, male spectatorship. The implication is that women who play football are abominations of their sex and will struggle to fulfil that one destiny afforded to all women: making a suitable marriage.

Although previous histories of women's football have considered Dixie's motives for being involved in the BLFC as a sporting decision, making the assumption that she had a 'dream' to see women playing soccer for its own sake, the reality is not so straightforward.<sup>135</sup> Lady Florence Dixie made it clear that saw her association with the British Ladies' Football Team as an excellent opportunity to further her 'publicly-expressed

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<sup>135</sup> James F. Lee, *The Lady Footballers: Struggling to Play in Victorian Britain*, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2008), p.xv. The few written accounts of this period in soccer history neglect to consider that the promotion of rational dress is Dixie's priority. Even though Lee goes on to quote a commentator in the *Pall Mall Gazette* state this as a likely motive (p.41), and says that contemporary Victorian observers may also have considered rational dress aims as Dixie's 'ulterior motive' given the nature of Dixie's literary output, the text as a whole makes clear that the author considers this secondary (p.51). This thesis considers this a mis-reading of the wider context.

ideas and well-known advocacy of rational dress for women'.<sup>136</sup> The Society for Rational Dress was formed in London in 1881, and Dixie was a supporter. She accepted the invitation to the presidency only on the agreement that 'the principles of the club must coincide' with the rational dress philosophy.<sup>137</sup> 'Football', she said 'is *the* sport for women, *the* pastime of all others which will ensure health, and assist in destroying the hydra-headed monster, the present dress for women'.<sup>138</sup> "No Goal" was undoubtedly not alone in thinking that as 'the recognized leader of the Advanced Women's brigade' Dixie's want of 'constantly going "one better" in her plan of campaign [...] may be the reason why she has thought it fit to champion the cause of lady footballers'.<sup>139</sup> Dixie indeed took every opportunity to set out her socio-political ideas and that she decided to present the winning team of the first British Ladies' Football Club match with a copy of her novel, *Gloriana; or, The Revolution of 1900*, is significant. The novel is rooted in socialist-feminist thought and features an all-female volunteer army ready for a feminist uprising. Gloriana masquerades as a boy, 'practis[ing] gender fraud in order to instigate a feminist revolution'.<sup>140</sup> Gloriana becomes Hector and like "his" namesake is a gallant, victorious warrior; a fighter for social justice delving into the patriarchy in order to subvert it. Hector sets out to become the British Prime Minister and instigate suffrage for women. Only by donning male attire can Gloriana prove that a woman can operate on the same terms as a man.<sup>141</sup> Dixie saw the women soccer players doing likewise, as the opening lines of her article for *The Pall Mall Gazette* emphasised:

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<sup>136</sup> *The Pall Mall Gazette*, 08 February, 1895, p.10.

<sup>137</sup> *The Pall Mall Gazette*, 08 February, 1895, p.10.

<sup>138</sup> *The Pall Mall Gazette*, 08 February, 1895, p.10.

<sup>139</sup> *The Pall Mall Gazette*, 23 February, 1895, p.9.

<sup>140</sup> Ann Heilmann, *New Woman Fiction: Women Writing First-Wave Feminism*, (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), p.130.

<sup>141</sup> Lady Florence Dixie, *Gloriana; or, The Revolution of 1900*, (London: Henry and Company, 1890).

There is no reason why football should not be played by women, and played well, too, provided they dress rationally and relegate to limbo the straight-jacket attire in which fashion delights to clothe them.<sup>142</sup>

She continued:

The members of the club do not play in fashion's dress, but in knickers and blouses. They actually allow the calves of their legs to be seen, and wear caps and football boots! Terrible! is it not?<sup>143</sup>

In *Gloriana*, Dixie had written what for anti-feminists would have been a nightmarish world, in which women cross-dress in order to define themselves in the public sphere of men. According to Ann Heilmann, *Gloriana* is one of many texts that suggest 'that the metaphor of the costume and the socially, sexually and politically transformative power of cross-dressing in New Woman fiction relates directly to wider cultural debates of the time'.<sup>144</sup> The British Ladies F.C. embodied this metaphor on the football field as opposed to the Westminster parliament.

Gloriana as a character was first presented in Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queen*, and was a literary representation of Queen Elizabeth I. Spenser's Gloriana, the eponymous Faerie Queen, was never present in his epic, but her castle was the intended destination of many of Spenser's characters and she held great authority within the narrative. Spenser's Gloriana was a signifier of female power within the text, just as the living Queen Elizabeth embodied power in reality. It cannot be by accident that Dixie chose to name her hero Gloriana; a name that had been associated with women inhabiting male positions of power for centuries. Dixie's Gloriana embodies the ultimate female power in a contemporary socialist world by becoming prime minister, inhabiting a space reserved

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<sup>142</sup> *The Pall Mall Gazette*, 08 February, 1895, p.10.

<sup>143</sup> *The Pall Mall Gazette*, 08 February, 1895, p.10.

<sup>144</sup> Ann Heilmann, *New Woman Fiction*, p.120.



only for men. The “lady footballers” inhabited this space too, challenging the Victorian patriarchy. Dixie’s philosophy was integral to her presidency of the football club as it was to her fiction: if women could dress like men, they could play sport like men, and then just what was there to stop women becoming politically active like men, being elected like men, and eventually ruling in the public sphere of men?

Despite having a number of high-profile, vociferous advocates, ‘in general, dress reformers, whether feminist or (as many were) anti-feminist, seem to have had relatively little influence on fashion’. And contrary to the hopes of Dixie, neither did sport. The fashion historian Valerie Steele has noted that when it came to fashion during this period,

The increasing popularity of sports for women probably gradually influenced the idea of feminine beauty, and this may have had a delayed and indirect effect on fashion. In any immediate sense, however, specialised sporting attire had little effect on ordinary dress [....] Fashion evolves gradually, and not in a series of jerky responses to external stimuli’.

For example, the length of skirts did not change between 1830 and 1900, and many feminists were apathetic to the calls for rational dress.<sup>145</sup> Cycling is often put forward as the instigator of a change in women’s fashion, but what ought to be considered is that for the middle-classes ‘the signs of leisure remained prestigious’. As Steele has noted:

Manual labour was a low status activity, and so it is not surprising that middle-class men and women wore clothing that testified to their exemption from such activity. Sports were socially prestigious, especially those that were expensive and associated with aristocracy, but men and women usually adopted *specialised* costumes, such as riding habits, for sport.<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> All quotations from Valerie Steele, *Fashion and Eroticism*, p.96.

<sup>146</sup> Both quotations from Valerie Steele, *Fashion and Eroticism*, p.91. Emphasis in original.

What was worn for physical activity or sport, then, did not translate into everyday clothing. If a woman wore a divided skirt for cycling, for instance, it did not mean that she was wearing relatively unrestricted clothing all of the time, for 'sports clothes [...] are signs of practicality' rather than broader emancipation.<sup>147</sup>

Vilification of rational dress and the New Woman was widespread. One rather curious advertisement that appeared in 1895 just after the formation of the British Ladies F.C. quoted the Bible in arguing against women adopting "masculine" clothing:

Deuteronomy, 5<sup>th</sup> Verse, 22<sup>nd</sup> Chapter - "The woman shall not wear that which pertaineth to a man ... for all that do so are an abomination unto the Lord thy God." – There can be no doubt that the Lady Bicyclist and the Lady Footballer are the criminals indicated'.<sup>148</sup>

Such "criminal" behaviour, infers the advertisement, would see women rejected by God as "abominations", tapping into *fin de siècle* anxiety over the challenge to gender codes typified by calls to free women from the restrictions of corsets, ribbons and bows. The prevailing attitude however, was much more moderate. As "Kathleen", the writer of the women's column in the *Leeds Mercury*, stated:

it is all a matter of fashion [...] In theory, you may wear anything you choose, no matter how original it may be; in practice, a severely conventional public objects to novelties.<sup>149</sup>

Steele has analysed the history of dress reform in great detail, and believes that even amongst the staunchest feminists the intersectionality of fashion and female morality was

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<sup>147</sup> Valerie Steele, *Fashion and Eroticism*, p.96.

<sup>148</sup> *Hull Daily Mail*, 29 March, 1895, p.3.

<sup>149</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 11 July, 1896, p.4.

key. The trend-setters of the period, such as actresses and society women, did not take up rational dress for it to turn into a symbol of attractiveness or social status. Supporters of the women's movement were often averse to such overt public displays of their political and oft-contentious views.<sup>150</sup> Indeed, many within the women's movement sought to emphasise their femininity and propriety when it came to furthering their cause. Abandoning conventional fashion was aligned with loose morals and bad manners, and adhering to the orthodox ways of dressing was considered "'good feminism'".<sup>151</sup> It was also an excellent way for militant feminists to blend into the background and remain undetected before committing disruptive acts of public protest.

Women's dress, Steele argues, has always accentuated women's appearance for the benefit of the male gaze and as a result

Dress reform was *not* an important influence on fashion, and indeed fashion did not *ever* develop in the direction of "rational" dress [...] but rather toward new versions of sexually attractive clothing.<sup>152</sup>

Despite Dixie's insistence on rational dress for the British Ladies' Football Club, there were some who thought that the women soccer players still looked sexually attractive to the male gaze. In 1896, on the second tour, the *Hull Daily Mail* reported that the women dressed respectably but with a hint of provocativeness:

the costume of the amazons is irreproachable, but it shows off to perfection their pretty figures. Any little indiscretions – in a

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<sup>150</sup> Valerie Steele, *Fashion and Eroticism*, p.157.

<sup>151</sup> Valerie Steele, *Fashion and Eroticism*, p.186.

<sup>152</sup> Valerie Steele, *Fashion and Eroticism*, p.5. Emphasis in original.

football sense – will, therefore, under the circumstances, be probably pardoned.<sup>153</sup>

The “feminine” show of physical beauty that the women put on for the largely male audience was enhanced by their clothing and more than made up for any lack of footballing skill or match quality. Nevertheless, despite assertions of propriety and good conduct, the majority of women shunned the spectatorship of ladies’ football. That the audience was largely male was testified by the club’s second captain, Mrs Helen Graham:

We have had a great many difficulties and prejudices to contend with, notably in Scotland [..] where at one place we were stoned by the women. It is so difficult for them to understand that a girl may be respectable and yet play football.<sup>154</sup>

Such a violent outrage on the touring footballers shows the strength of feeling among some ordinary women against such a public display of sexual indecency. That married women were part of the team, presumably with their husbands’ approval, made no difference at all to this mind-set.

In Yorkshire, where rugby was still the dominant sport, the local newspapers derived much mirth from speculating whether one player in particular, Daisy Allen, was actually a woman. Allen had been given the nickname “Tommy” and the *Sheffield Independent* described her as a ‘tricky little left-winger [...] the youngest and considerably the cleverest of the lot’.<sup>155</sup> The *Yorkshire Evening Post*, in its derisive reporting on the

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<sup>153</sup> *Hull Daily Mail*, 29 April, 1896, p.4.

<sup>154</sup> *Hull Daily Mail*, 28 October, 1895, p.3.

<sup>155</sup> *Sheffield Independent*, 07 May, 1895, p.8; *Yorkshire Evening Post*, 10 May, 1895, p.4. James Lee has documented that in early matches “Tommy” was used as a nickname for Miss Gilbert, but since 13 April four regional papers, *Bury Times*, *Newark Herald*, *Evening Dispatch* (Edinburgh), *Maidenhead Advertiser*, this name was used to refer to Daisy Allen. See James F. Lee, *The Lady Footballers: Struggling to Play in Victorian Britain*, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2008), pp.96-103. My research adds the *Sheffield Independent* and the *Yorkshire Evening Post* to the list of papers who refer to Allen as “Tommy” and gives a third name, Miss Vernon, as another candidate for the moniker. See *Yorkshire Evening Post*, 10 May, 1895, p.3.

teams' appearance in Leeds, insisted that Tommy was male: 'He was the life and soul of the game; but for *him* it would have been less cheerful than a funeral procession'.<sup>156</sup> The women were killing the game of football and of course only a man could have skill enough to rescue it. Despite its opinion that 'as a burlesque of the game the exhibition was fairly successful', the *Leeds Mercury* reported on the same match in a serious tone. Allen, although not explicitly named, is marked out as 'by far the best player' and her standout skill shows up her fellow players as 'very clumsy by comparison'.<sup>157</sup> For the *Leeds Mercury*, Allen is definitively a 'little lady' and a 'girl'.<sup>158</sup> A second report in the *Yorkshire Evening Post* disagreed, with the author of the 'Yorkshire Echoes' column stating unequivocally that

It has already been stated that Tommy is a boy. I think there is no doubt about it; a boy put into skirts to look girlish, and to handicap him.<sup>159</sup>

Here, Tommy is declared a mere *boy*, the noun allaying a deep-rooted anxiety that the women may eventually be good enough to play with men. If a young boy could 'run round her (or his) more bulky opponents with the ease of a terrier circumventing a St. Bernard' then the men's game, with its scientific skills and masculine energy, was surely safe.<sup>160</sup> The report deemed the match a farce, disparaging the technique of the women who 'could neither kick, run, nor play the game' and reducing the women to imbecilic know-nothings that 'often kicked towards their own net' and 'kicked as often with their knees as with their toes'.<sup>161</sup> Despite judging that many of the players were 'fair of face', the male gaze was declared disappointed: 'The Lady cricketers managed to look aesthetic; but

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<sup>156</sup> *Yorkshire Evening Post*, 10 May, 1895, p.4 (my emphasis).

<sup>157</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 10 May, 1895, p.7.

<sup>158</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 10 May, 1895, p.7.

<sup>159</sup> *Yorkshire Evening Post*, 10 May, 1895, p.3.

<sup>160</sup> *Yorkshire Evening Post*, 10 May, 1895, p.3.

<sup>161</sup> *Yorkshire Evening Post*, 10 May, 1895, p.3.

the Lady Footballers could not'.<sup>162</sup> In the end, it was not just "Tommy" who did not look like a woman.

One could surmise that it was never likely that women's soccer could take off in a region so dominated by the handling code. When, in 1895, the Bradford Ladies Football Club organised an exhibition match by the British Ladies' Football Club, the match took place at Valley Parade, the home of Manningham, a strong Northern Union team who would become champions in the Northern Union's inaugural competition of 1895-96.<sup>163</sup> The area was a hotbed of rugby where soccer did not much feature and there were very few soccer fans from which the women could draw a sustained crowd, as it would be another four years before the formation of the Bradford and District Football Association and eight years before the town got its own competitive representative soccer club, Bradford City AFC. Indeed, it did not take long before the women soccer players became part of rugby's parlance of disparagement; in October 1895 when Hull F.C. hosted St. Helens, a wry insult had consequences for Hull's Herbert Thompson:

After the match Herb. Thompson was heard to remark that Lady Florence Dixie had gained a great victory. "In what way," inquired a fellow player. "Well, we've just let a lot of Helens beat us. Just shows what women can do." He was instantly knocked down.<sup>164</sup>

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<sup>162</sup> *Yorkshire Evening Post*, 10 May, 1895, p.3.

<sup>163</sup> Dave Welbourne, "'An unsuitable game for women': Women's Football in Bradford, 1895-1922' in *Soccer History*, No 36, (2015), p.26.

<sup>164</sup> *Hull Daily Mail*, 21 October, 1895, p.3.

## Conclusion

As this chapter has demonstrated, throughout the nineteenth century, women were keen supporters of rugby, something that has hitherto not been fully appreciated by historians of women's sport. Yet this was not necessarily a sign of increasing emancipation. The act of playing cannot be seen simply in terms of female empowerment and a fight for the "right to play". Indeed, much of the Victorians' discussion around women's football emphasised the sport as a vehicle with which to achieve more culturally-important goals that impacted on wider social issues, such as women's improved health, beauty, dress and how it could help them become more useful and attractive members of society. Nevertheless, women, especially those of the working-class, could not simply break free of the chains of Victorian society, and to consider those early women footballers of the 1880s and 1890s as symbols of female emancipation is a misreading of history and its broader context.

## Chapter Two: New Century, New Women?

*Fin de siècle* anxiety gave way to the new century and brought with it varying degrees of continuity and change. This chapter will consider the scrutiny working-class women's lives underwent by the middle-class ideologues and the dialogues of propriety surrounding some leisure pursuits for women. The violence of rugby and how it consolidated the sport as a masculine sphere at a time of falling attendances amongst women is noted, and the effect of the fledging celebrity of rugby players in drawing attention to domestic violence is analysed. The paternalistic stance of the Northern Union in the face of players' risk of injury and on-field death is evaluated and its compatibility with the reality of family and household budgets is measured. The sport's preoccupation with community is shown to be selective through an investigation and analysis of two case studies, in which one family benefits but another, in which the player who was the "head of the family" had committed misdemeanours, was relegated to the ranks of the "undeserving poor" and left to its natural fate. Sacrifices women made providing passive, practical, maternal support to the sport's off-field committeemen is also documented. Finally, the chapter concludes by considering the place of sport in the psyche of the suffragettes as a prominent cultural symbol of male dominance, and how they ventured into the realm of rugby league. It will show how rugby utilised the stereotype of the degenerate suffragette to comment on itself, presenting a narrative of perfect masculine beauty as embodied by rugby versus an abhorrent, violent femininity.



On New Year's Day, 1901, writers for the *Manchester Guardian* looked back on the preceding century under the heading 'The Nineteenth Century: A Retrospect: Some Aspects of Thought'. Under the subheading of 'Society', G. W. E. Russell commented on the revolution in gendered expectations during the latter decades, stating that a 'most notable change of recent times has been the social emancipation of women. It may safely be said that whatever men do nowadays women do'.<sup>1</sup> Russell listed the many leisure activities open to women, such as driving, horse riding, shooting, fishing, skating, swimming, fencing and smoking. 'They go everywhere, read and talk about everything', he wrote. Bodily functions were no longer a taboo subject and disease was declared 'a favourite topic' among women, as were 'pleasantries about appendicitis and maternity'.<sup>2</sup> The revolution was, according to Russell, being led by young women: 'the younger the woman the more complete the emancipation'.<sup>3</sup> As Sheila Rowbotham has discussed, some 'small groups' of women did defy convention, deliberating the merits of free love, the hindrances of marriage, discoursing women's sexuality. However, this culture had limited social inclusion amongst women who were already sympathetic to new, political ways of thinking: 'schoolteachers, clerical workers and skilled working-class women who were active in both the suffrage movement and socialism were likely to be part of this radical culture'.<sup>4</sup> However, whilst women in the upper echelons of society were increasingly more able to access education and undertake a wider variety of leisure pursuits, the same cannot be said for working-class women at the turn of the century, who between work and domestic duties had little time, money or energy for leisure. The

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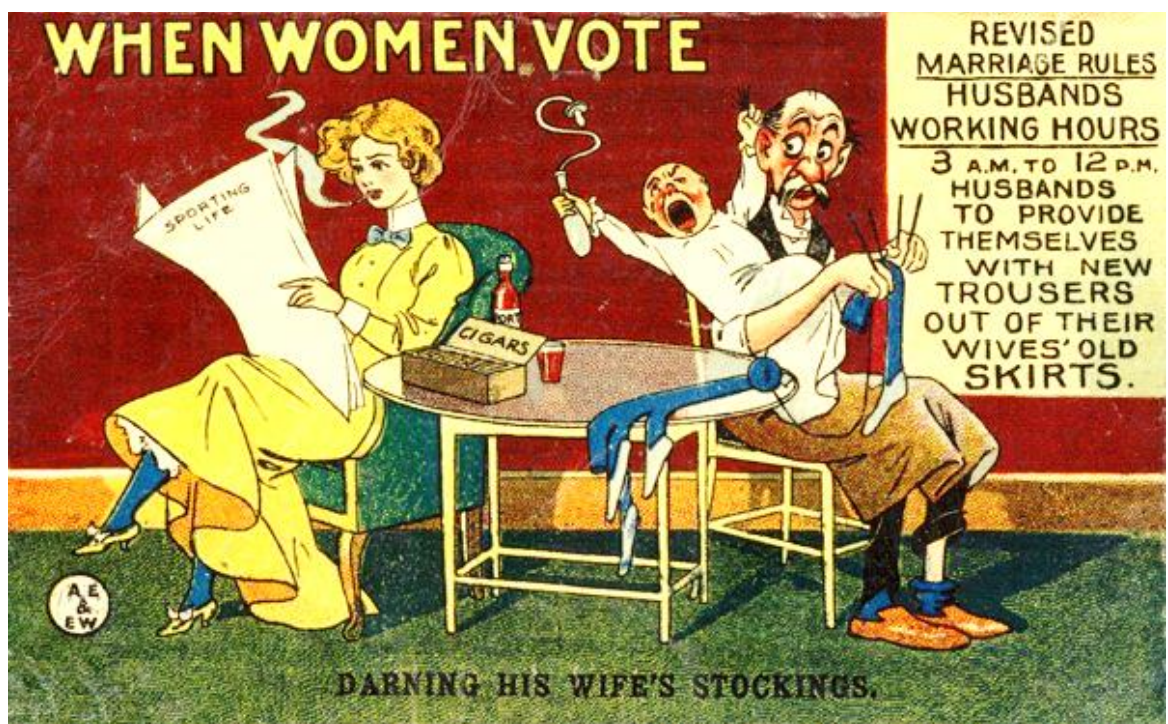
<sup>1</sup> *The Manchester Guardian*, 01 January, 1901, p.8.

<sup>2</sup> *The Manchester Guardian*, 01 January, 1901, p.8.

<sup>3</sup> *The Manchester Guardian*, 01 January, 1901, p.8.

<sup>4</sup> Sheila Rowbotham, *A Century of Women: A History of Women in Britain and the United States*, (London: Viking, 1997), p.8.

advancement of science over the nineteenth century and the greater understanding of evolutionary biology amongst the populace had reinforced the notion of separate, gendered spheres, resulting in a tightening of gender roles.<sup>5</sup> Even the suffrage movement emphasised the traditional domestic womanliness of its members and supporters in a series of postcards, titled “Suffragettes at Home”, to combat the prevailing notion put forth by anti-suffrage critics that suffragettes were neglecting their duties as housewives and mothers. The theme of much of the anti-suffrage propaganda was that women’s suffrage would undermine traditional masculinity, even in sporting terms as the postcard below shows:



**Figure 3:** The anxiety of the reversal of gender roles is depicted in this anti-suffrage postcard, as a downtrodden husband juggles household chores and childcare whilst his wife catches luxuriates with a copy of *Sporting Life*, a glass of port and a cigar (c.1906).<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Cynthia Eagle Russett, *Sexual Science: The Victorian Construction of Womanhood*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1989), p.12.

<sup>6</sup> Bridgeman Images, *Darning His Wife's Stockings*, [Postcard]. Available: <https://www.bridgemanimages.com/en-GB/blog/bridgeman/post/6108/vintage-anti-suffrage-postcards> [Accessed 09 October, 2013].

Rugby in the north was not immune from the depth of these changes in society and the questioning of women's role. Rugby was influenced by these changes whilst also reflecting the way society was changing. Indeed, at the dawn of the new century even the language of one Northern Union club's annual reports reflected the gendered nature of its business, as in its 1900-1901 report Hull Kingston Rovers ceased referring to 'members' and replaced it with 'gentlemen' instead.<sup>7</sup> As home was reinforced as the place where women belonged, by contrast the sphere of working-class leisure increasingly became dominated by men.

With the wider discussion of women's rights came the wider public scrutiny of women's private lives. Working-class women in particular bore the brunt of the middle-class, ideological probing of social reformers and educationalists.<sup>8</sup> This could be seen in the communities of which the Northern Union was part in the north of England: one example of the scrutiny of women's leisure occurred on November 24<sup>th</sup>, 1906, when a 'large attendance' heard the president of the Halifax and District Band of Hope Union, Mr. A. Whitaker, give a lecture on 'Women and Saturday Drinking'.<sup>9</sup> Halifax was one of rugby's strongholds, and the local club was one of the leading sides in the country, winning the Rugby League Championship that season. The Band of Hope Union 'existed for the spreading of total abstinence principles among all classes of society' but they were especially concerned about what they deemed to be the increased drinking among women. Over a six-week period, members of the Union had been carrying out observations, between nine and ten o'clock on Saturday evenings, of 'certain public-

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<sup>7</sup> Hull Kingston Rovers Annual Reports, 1898-1899, 1899-1900, 1900-1901, 1901-1902.

<sup>8</sup> Judy Giles, *Women, Identity and Private Life in Britain, 1900-1950*, (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1995), p.18.

<sup>9</sup> *Halifax Evening Courier*, 26 November, 1906, p.2.

houses and spirit-vaults in Halifax with the view of ascertaining the number of women frequenting them'. The figures they collected showed that five percent of Halifax's women entered the venues, taking with them fifty-four children aged under twelve years, and four babes-in-arms. "The pity of it", declared Whitaker, "was that 54 children entered these places – (hear, hear) – and heard and saw such things as took place there".<sup>10</sup> The Union were concerned about propriety and cited the widely-held belief that it was 'unwomanly and disreputable to frequent the public house'. Some women entered alone and unaccompanied, but they arrived 'mostly in twos and threes, and not one-third were accompanied by presumably their husbands'. That more than two-thirds of women were attending without male companionship was shocking to the Union: "did the husbands know their wives were frequenting these places? They ought to get to know", Whitaker opined. For the moralists, female agency could only exist within the parameters set by their menfolk. Of more concern was the notion that biologically, women would suffer from the effects of alcohol, proffering that 'infantile mortality' was a grave risk. "if [women] wanted healthy children, children that would be a credit to them in after life, the less the wives spent on drink the better it would be for them". Women's duty to motherhood was their biological destiny and liquor could damage the delicate reproductive capacity of women. This rigid demarcation of separate spheres in leisure was manifested most sharply in the underlying violence of rugby.

Nothing established the game as a masculine kingdom more than violence, and violence both on and off the pitch was frequent as one century turned into the next. In

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<sup>10</sup> *Halifax Evening Courier*, 26 November, 1906, p.2.

Victorian England, there had been a fundamental shift over the course of the century towards the greater “civilisation” of all classes, and crimes against persons were dealt with much more severely than ever before.<sup>11</sup> Martin Weiner has argued that developments in criminal justice contributed towards the “reconstruction of gender” of women as vulnerable creatures of morality and men as ‘more dangerous, more than ever in need of external disciplines and, most of all, *self-discipline*’.<sup>12</sup> The Industrial Revolution that had brought the working-classes *en masse* to the towns and cities led to fears of ‘a new barbarism’ that the middle-class authorities sought to suppress.<sup>13</sup> Male violence was ‘denounced as a relic of benighted ages and a practice of barbaric peoples’ but for men predisposed to aggression, the armed forces provided a legitimate avenue down which to channel their tendencies, as did sport, and rugby in particular.<sup>14</sup> Yet in these domains of sanctioned violence, still the participants were fettered, and rugby players, just like the members of the armed forces, ‘needed to be models of law-abiding, orderly virtues’.<sup>15</sup> Even in these last bastions of violence nostalgia had to operate within the modern, moral rules. Even the ‘traditional tolerance’ of domestic forms of violence against women, usually wives, ‘was increasingly investigated, censured and punished by more active – or intrusive – agents of criminal justice’.<sup>16</sup>

The increasing celebrity of rugby players meant that those accused of domestic violence were extensively reported in the press. In 1895, William Gameson, a labourer

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<sup>11</sup> Martin J. Wiener, *Men of Blood: Violence, Manliness, and Criminal Justice in Victorian England*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p.3.

<sup>12</sup> Martin J. Wiener, *Men of Blood*, p.3. Emphasis in original.

<sup>13</sup> Martin J. Wiener, *Men of Blood*, p.13.

<sup>14</sup> Martin J. Wiener, *Men of Blood*, p.6.

<sup>15</sup> Martin J. Wiener, *Men of Blood*, p.14.

<sup>16</sup> Martin J. Wiener, *Men of Blood*, p.6.

and player at Wakefield Trinity was charged with sexually assaulting Ella Pepper, a thirteen-year-old daughter of his landlady. However, the reticence of Ella in reporting the crime was seized upon by the defence lawyer, who subjected the young girl to aggressive questioning and cast doubt upon her moral integrity, and the case was dismissed by the magistrates.<sup>17</sup> Cardiff and Hull's Thomas Savage was sentenced to 'three months' imprisonment with hard labour' for punching a policeman and kicking him, after the constable had intervened in a quarrel Savage was having with a woman in the street.<sup>18</sup> John Sutcliffe, who began his rugby career at Bradford in 1886, was a serial offender against his wife. After a short spell at Heckmondwike in 1889, during which he played for England against New Zealand, he was accused of professionalism by the rugby authorities and immediately switched codes, converting to soccer after gaining a contract with Bolton Wanderers. Upon his arrest in February 1897 for 'savagely' attacking his wife, he was brought before Bolton County Police Court where his wife's solicitor asked for the case to be withdrawn, on account of them both agreeing 'to live together peaceably'.<sup>19</sup> When the presiding magistrate asked how long their agreement would last, the solicitor replied "'For the rest of their natural lives'". The magistrate was not convinced, replying "'Next week. He has a bad record, and has been up seven times'".<sup>20</sup> By 1901, the Sutcliffes' marriage was over, and John appeared before Bolton magistrates in 1905 for unpaid wife maintenance arrears, 'he owing over £30 on a 15s per week order [having] not paid anything since last May'.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> *Pontefract and Castleford Express*, 21 September, 1895, p.2.

<sup>18</sup> *The Manchester Guardian*, 19 April, 1906, p.3.

<sup>19</sup> *Hull Daily Mail*, 10 February, 1897, p.3; *Sheffield Independent*, 12 February, p.8.

<sup>20</sup> *Sheffield Independent*, 12 February, p.8.

<sup>21</sup> *Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser*, 09 May, 1905, p.11.

Despite the overall cultural shift to a more peaceful society, rugby still had many incidents of unacceptable violence, not least amongst its spectators. However, as the twentieth century dawned it was now reported as particularly *masculine* violence, in contrast to the earlier women “hooligans” in the 1880s. One notable event in West Yorkshire in the January of 1898 saw players and spectators from Sharlston set upon and viciously assault the opposition players from Kippax: ‘Sharlston players and spectators had kicked and punched members of the Kippax team after a game. Many had to run two miles to escape’. Sharlston felt the full force of the Rugby Football Union and the club was suspended *sine die*.<sup>22</sup> It has been shown that women’s attendance at matches declined at the start of the twentieth century, but incidents like that at Sharlston confirmed that those that did attend reckoned with potential spectator violence at every game. In the eight years prior to rugby’s split there were twenty-four incidents of crowd disturbances in the Yorkshire Rugby Union, including two pitch invasions.<sup>23</sup> In the Northern Union, there were thirty instances of crowd disturbances between 1895 and 1910, with Rochdale being the chief offender with four incidents, followed by three at Keighley, with Swinton, Castleford, Huddersfield and Hull posting two each. Of those offences, eighteen were directed at the referee, eight towards the opposition, four were earmarked as caused by ‘rowdy boys’, with one each being against the police and the players on the pitch.<sup>24</sup> One particularly ‘hostile demonstration’ occurred on January 31<sup>st</sup>, 1903, when Huddersfield entertained Salford at Fartown and lost the match 6-12.<sup>25</sup> The home spectators were angry with the unsportsmanlike conduct of Salford’s James Lomas, but blamed the

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<sup>22</sup> Ian Clayton, *100 Years of Featherstone Rugby*, p.40.

<sup>23</sup> Tony Collins, *Rugby’s Great Split*, pp.205-206.

<sup>24</sup> Details from Tony Collins, *Rugby’s Great Split*, p.213.

<sup>25</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 02 February, 1903, p.8.

referee, J. H. Smith, for not keeping him in check.<sup>26</sup> The antagonism towards the player and the official was so strong that Smith and both sets of players had leave the field with a police escort.<sup>27</sup> Undeterred and fuelled by fury, some spectators attempted to gain access to the dressing rooms via the adjoining cricket pitch, whilst some young men and boys waited for the visitors to leave the ground and proceeded to pelt Salford's wagonette with missiles.<sup>28</sup> Smith, whose rulings were the seat of the outrage, managed to escape via a rear entrance.<sup>29</sup> The resulting punishment administered by the Northern Rugby League Committee, was that the Huddersfield ground be suspended for eighteen days from February 10<sup>th</sup>, resulting in the loss of two lucrative home games and the added expense of playing those games on alternative grounds.<sup>30</sup> In his 'Football Echoes' column in the *Yorkshire Evening Post*, "Old Ebor", the *nom de plume* of A. W. Pullin, lamented that the club would suffer as a result of 'a few hooligans' but was thankful that the game saw 'far fewer ebullitions of this kind in first-class football in Yorkshire than used to be the case a few years ago'.<sup>31</sup> He closed his opinion piece with a subtle use of the language of masculinity, stating that he hoped that in the future spectators would maintain a 'rational spirit' and take bad results with 'sportsmen's fortitude'.<sup>32</sup> To be irrational was the preserve of women, and such a melee diluted the upstanding masculinity of the sport. As Martin Weiner has discussed, the association of 'self-assertion, physical dominance and others traditionally associated with masculinity' changed radically in the nineteenth century as 'the ideal of the "man of honour" [gave] way to that of the "man of dignity"'.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 02 February, 1903, p.8.

<sup>27</sup> *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, 02 February, 1903, p.4.

<sup>28</sup> *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, 02 February, 1903, p.4.

<sup>29</sup> *Yorkshire Evening Post*, 02 February, 1903, p.3.

<sup>30</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 11 February, 1903, p.10; *Lancashire Evening Post*, 11 February, 1903, p.5; *Yorkshire Evening Post*, 14 February, 1903, p.5.

<sup>31</sup> *Yorkshire Evening Post*, 14 February, 1903, p.5.

<sup>32</sup> *Yorkshire Evening Post*, 14 February, 1903, p.5.



In 1903, the men and boys that constituted the “rowdy” Huddersfield spectators would have been expected to display ‘peaceableness and self-restraint’, upholding the values of the masculine gender.<sup>33</sup>

This trend towards intolerance of violence between people juxtaposed with the ever-growing and advancing militarism of British society. Men with a tendency towards aggression found two arenas where they could channel their energies: war and rugby. Whilst there is no doubting the risk to life and limb in the field of war, that risk was also a reality on the field of play. For Bradford, that risk to bodily integrity was enough that in the 1884-85 season they refused to play Hull due to ‘the general rough and unscientific play of the Hull team’.<sup>34</sup> The following season, the Hull club introduced a compensation scheme for its players, allowing financial support for those players unfortunate enough to be injured in-play.<sup>35</sup> Injuries could be financially disastrous for a player and his dependent family, especially if that player was of the working class. The violence of the sport was an occupational hazard for a rugby player on two fronts, as some injuries could be completely debilitating and ruin a man’s employment prospects. One example is that of Workington’s Evan Richards, a steelworker, who lived with and supported his widowed mother, sister and an eight-year-old cousin.<sup>36</sup> In 1904, the Northern Union General Committee awarded £15 as he ‘had the misfortune to lose a foot’.<sup>37</sup> The Northern Union would also grant discretionary payments to those who proved their need, such as to Mr

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<sup>33</sup> Martin J. Wiener, *Men of Blood*, p.6.

<sup>34</sup> Hull Football Club Reports and Accounts Season 1884-1885, p.7.

<sup>35</sup> Hull Football Club Reports and Accounts Season 1885-1886, p.18.

<sup>36</sup> ‘Richards, Evan’, *1901 Census of England, Wales, Scotland, Channel Islands and Isle of Man*. Available: [www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com)

<sup>37</sup> Northern Rugby Football Union, Minutes of the General Committee, 09 August, 1904.

Marshall, a referee who had a prolonged illness that had debilitated him for fifteen months. The Union granted him 50 guineas to help alleviate his 'very distressing' financial circumstances.<sup>38</sup> A number of individual clubs took out insurance policies to safeguard the welfare of their players, but these did not pay enough for a player to live on for long.<sup>39</sup> The hazards of "foul play" were frequent. As Collins has discovered, in the 1903-04 season, one hundred and eleven incidents of foul play resulted in referral to the Northern Union General Committee and one hundred and five, or ninety-four per cent, of those resulted in player suspensions.<sup>40</sup> Of those misdemeanours that could be identified, striking accounted for forty-two, kicking for thirty, rough play for ten and fighting for six.<sup>41</sup>

For some of the most unfortunate players, the biggest fight they encountered on the rugby field was with death. Between 1886 and 1895, there were thirteen deaths in Yorkshire rugby alone, an average of 1.4 per year.<sup>42</sup> The Northern Union's formation did little to alter the statistics for between 1895 and 1906 there were ten rugby-related deaths recorded.<sup>43</sup> The loss of a loved one would not only take an emotional toll, but could ruin the finances of the family left behind to fend for itself. Wives and children would lose their chief source of income, something that was recognised by the sport's governing body. Compensation would be granted, such as this example from 1900 when 'a sum of £25 was voted to the relatives of the late James Thomas (Manningham), whose

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<sup>38</sup> Northern Rugby Football Union, Minutes of the General Committee, 09 August, 1904.

<sup>39</sup> Tony Collins, *Rugby's Great Split*, pp.100-101.

<sup>40</sup> Tony Collins, *Rugby's Great Split*, p.214.

<sup>41</sup> Tony Collins, *Rugby's Great Split*, p.214.

<sup>42</sup> Tony Collins, *Rugby's Great Split*, p.207.

<sup>43</sup> Tony Collins, *Rugby's Great Split*, p.214.

death had been caused through a football accident'.<sup>44</sup> But it was the death of Keighley's Harry Myers from damage to his spinal cord that sparked an unusual moment in rugby league history.

### Black Cats, Family Distress and Community Support

Although the presence of women on the rugby pitch was taboo, the culture of the game did admit symbolic femininity. One of the ways in which this happened was in the use of mascots, and in particular the first recorded rugby club mascot used the familiar trope of the lucky black cat. Cats have long been a symbol of femininity; as early as the first millennium BCE, the female black cat became revered as a manifestation of the goddess of protection, Bastet.<sup>45</sup> When a black cat 'walked unostentatiously' into the offices of Halifax F.C. and made herself comfortable on Monday, November 19<sup>th</sup>, 1906, no one knew just what a harbinger of fortune she would become. The club secretary had something of an aversion to cats, but the team's Welsh half-back, Tommy Grey, was superstitious enough to ensure that this female feline did not walk away and take her luck with her and so gave her a 'little token of esteem' by buttering her paws.<sup>46</sup>

The notion that black cats are a symbol of good luck has existed for millennia and in enticing the newcomer to stay at the club Tommy Grey was merely tapping into this ancient belief. Cats were considered sacred animals that gave protection and were protected in return. Egyptian hieroglyphs often showed knife-wielding cats, embodiments

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<sup>44</sup> Northern Rugby Football Union, Minutes of the General Committee, 03 April, 1900.

<sup>45</sup> Jaromir Malek, *The Cat in Ancient Egypt*, (London: British Museum Press, 1993), p.57.

<sup>46</sup> *Halifax Evening Courier*, 25 January, 1907, p.5.

of good, slaying snakes, the embodiment of evil. Female cats in particular were worshipped and asked to 'grant life, prosperity and health'.<sup>47</sup> England too had its own age-old superstitions, such as the cats that were witches' familiars, and this rhyme is an example of how such ideas of the cat's significance were passed orally through the centuries:

Black cat, cross my path  
Good fortune bring to home and hearth  
When I am away from home  
Bring me luck wherever I roam  
- Old English Charm.<sup>48</sup>

The club duly adopted the newcomer who had crossed its path, and she was given the name Smut on account of her sooty colouring.

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<sup>47</sup> Jaromir Malek, *The Cat in Ancient Egypt*, p.92.

<sup>48</sup> Dusty Rainbolt, *Ghost Cats: Human Encounters with Feline Spirits*, (Guilford, Connecticut: The Lyons Press, 2007), p.20.



Halifax's Black Cat.

**Figure 4:** Smut with a Halifax Player.<sup>49</sup>

'No ordinary common or kitchen cat', Smut was

regarded as handsome. Her intelligent face, beautiful fur, and bushy tail, strongly favours a Persian strain in her not far-removed antecedents. Her pedigree would certainly be a good one if it were only known, but it is safe to say from Smut's all-round demeanour and deportment that she must spring from aristocratic circles.<sup>50</sup>

She made herself at home very quickly, taking a liking for the players' dressing room and gambolling with the team.<sup>51</sup> Curiously, after her arrival the Halifax club began a most remarkable winning streak. By the final day of January, 1907, "The Black Cat Brigade", as

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<sup>49</sup> *The Boy's Own Paper*, 08 February, 1908, p.298.

<sup>50</sup> *Halifax Evening Courier*, 25 January, 1907, p.5.

<sup>51</sup> *Halifax Evening Courier*, 25 January, 1907, p.5.

the club became known, had won fourteen consecutive matches.<sup>52</sup> Smut would go to games 'decked in club colours'<sup>53</sup> and she was becoming something of a celebrity within and beyond Halifax, with newspapers all over England reporting on her talismanic significance.<sup>54</sup> The media coverage did not take long to reach the attention of the most prominent "black cat" in England – Carreras Black Cat Cigarettes. The company secretary, Mr. H. W. Danbury, pounced on the opportunity for some publicity and wrote to Mr. Ricketts, the Halifax secretary offering

with our compliments 1,000 of our "Black Cat" cigarettes, and 2lbs. of our "Black Cat" tobacco, which we wish to present to your team as a little token of regard for black cats in general, and yours in particular.<sup>55</sup>

The company also offered a 'narrow collar' made of 'morocco leather' for Smut, bearing a silver-plate name tag 'so that in the unfortunate event of the cat being enticed away [...] she may be quickly restored to you'.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 31 January, 1907, p.3; *Halifax Evening Courier*, 23 February, 1907, p.4.

<sup>53</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 04 February, 1907, p.7.

<sup>54</sup> For examples see *Bath Chronicle and Weekly Gazette*, 31 January, 1907, p.7; *Cambridge Independent Press*, 01 February, 1907, p.2.

<sup>55</sup> *Halifax Evening Courier*, 31 January, 1907, p.4.

<sup>56</sup> *Halifax Evening Courier*, 31 January, 1907, p.4.



**Figure 5:** The first Black Cat brand cigarettes, 1904.<sup>57</sup>



Black Smut is the Queen of the Thrum Hall Thirteen  
Who took care her paws well to butter,  
If they don't part with smut and alter their Luck  
They'll come out at top with a flutter.

**Figure 6:** The "Queen of the Thrum Hall Thirteen" bedecked in club colours.<sup>58</sup>

The club accepted with thanks and included a photograph of Smut. On February 9th, a parcel arrived from London, containing 'a blue and white morocco leather collar, with a solid silver buckle and a silver plate bearing the following inscription: Smut, the Halifax team's mascot. Thrum Hall Grounds, Halifax'.<sup>59</sup> In her new finery, Smut drew in local "worshippers" who made the short pilgrimage to Thrum Hall pavilion to admire her.<sup>60</sup> The club even took her to away matches and the *Yorkshire Evening Post* was somewhat baffled,

<sup>57</sup> Old Shop Stuff, *Carreras Black Cat Cigarette Packet*, c.1904, [Photograph]. Available: <http://www.oldshopstuff.com/Shop/tabid/1248/ItemID/20943/Listing/Old-tobacco-cigarette-packet-Carreras-Black-Cat-cigarettes-1904-crop/Default.aspx> [Accessed: 09 October, 1913].

<sup>58</sup> Andrew Hardcastle, 'The "Queen of the Thrum Hall Thirteen"' in *The Thrum Hall Story: A History of Halifax R.L.F.C.*, (Halifax: Self-published, 1986), p.53.

<sup>59</sup> *Yorkshire Evening Post*, 09 February, 1907, p.7.

<sup>60</sup> *Halifax Evening Courier*, 09 February, 1907, p.3.

remarking: 'the faith that Halifax have in that black cat passes all understanding'.<sup>61</sup> But as Halifax kept their unbeaten run intact, the local papers went into black cat frenzy. Hardly a day went by without reference to Smut and her occult feline influence. There were cartoons drawn, children submitted poems, stories and drawings to the Children's Corner to win prizes, and even long articles about historic, mythical and literary cats appeared.<sup>62</sup> One correspondent issued a warning that if Smut 'be the true cat of the legend, "The Cat That Walks Alone": the Cat in league with the Fates' then her hour would be

inexorably fixed. Let the Halifax Committee beware! [She] will "reach [her] grand climacteric" and vanish just as mysteriously as [she], and all the silver collars and other gew-gaws of the Calder Valley will not keep [her].<sup>63</sup>

The superstitions of sportsmen such as Walter Lees, the Surrey cricketer and C.B. Fry, the multi-sports athlete and politician were repeated, and the self-penned songs about Smut sung by local club singers were written verbatim.<sup>64</sup> Opposition players were asked about the cat's effect. Warrington's Jack Fish was reported to be 'bringing over a running dog of the same name' with the intention of 'putting an end' to Smut and ending the 'remarkable sequence of victories' that Halifax had accumulated.<sup>65</sup> The *Hull Daily Mail* showed a little bitterness, reminding its readers of the

fact that all records for Northern Union football are still held by the Rovers and Hull clubs. Halifax have yet to win a few more games before they equal the past performances of either of our

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<sup>61</sup> *Yorkshire Evening Post*, 11 February, 1907, p.3.

<sup>62</sup> For examples of cartoons see: *Yorkshire Evening Post*, 09 February, 1907, p.7; *Halifax Evening Courier*, 11 February, 1907, p.4. For children's submissions see: *Halifax Courier*, 16 February, 1907, p.8 and 23 February, 1907, p.8. The most interesting and thorough long article appeared in the *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, 18 February, 1907, p.7.

<sup>63</sup> *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, 18 February, 1907, p.7.

<sup>64</sup> *Halifax Evening Courier*, 20 February, 1907, p.2.

<sup>65</sup> *Halifax Evening Courier*, 11 February, 1907, p.4.



two local teams, and they both made their records without the aid of a cat.<sup>66</sup>

However, the Hull clubs' records remained intact, for on February 23<sup>rd</sup>, the unbeaten run they had held since November 17<sup>th</sup>, 1906, a total of twenty-one games, was broken by Salford, a club they had not beaten in over twenty years.<sup>67</sup> The *Yorkshire Evening Post* was delighted and hoped that everyone would 'drop this nonsensical "black cat" superstition'.<sup>68</sup> Nevertheless, Batley acquired its very own cat and Oldham suggested that theirs would beat everyone else's over '10 rounds under Queensbury rules [...] but no match was made'.<sup>69</sup> Despite other clubs jumping on the proverbial bandwagon, Smut remained the 'one and only original Black Cat'. Halifax were victorious winners of the Northern Union Championship and many cited Smut as the source of the club's good fortune. Sadly, for the football club, the "Year of the Cat" was over and the prophecy of Smut's time being "inexorably fixed" rang true. Her mission seemingly

ended with the close of the football season for [she] disappeared soon after the "Blue and Whites" won the Northern championship. How [she] disappeared is a mystery, but it is whispered that another Northern Union club low down the League table, have "signed [her] on" for next season.<sup>70</sup>

Smut had become a symbol of female support, a feline "lady luck" that carried the success of Halifax with her wherever she went. Yet her impact went beyond mere temporal frivolity and the story of Smut demonstrated another aspect of the way in which femaleness became part of rugby league culture, when she was used by the Halifax club as a fundraising tactic for a distressed wife and her children.

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<sup>66</sup> *Hull Daily Mail*, 21 February, 1907, p.2.

<sup>67</sup> *Halifax Evening Courier*, 23 February 1907, p.4.

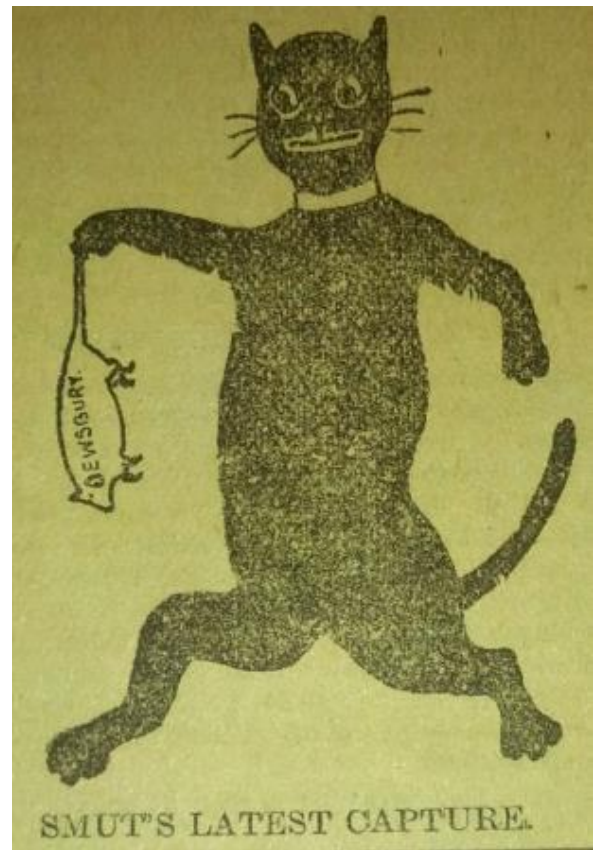
<sup>68</sup> *Yorkshire Evening Post*, 25 February, 1907, p.3.

<sup>69</sup> *Hull Daily Mail*, 12 March, 1907, p.8.

<sup>70</sup> *Yorkshire Evening Post*, 24 August, 1907, p.3; Robert Gate, *Gone North, Volume Two*, (Ripponden: Self-published, 1988), p.116.



**Figure 7:** The Yorkshire Evening Post's unflattering cartoon of Smut on a pedestal. The genie-type figure on the far left represents the element of luck that a black cat was said to possess.<sup>71</sup>



**Figure 8:** A rather simplistic cartoon drawing of Smut after Halifax beat Dewsbury 29-5 on 10<sup>th</sup> February, 1907.<sup>72</sup>

On the evening 19<sup>th</sup> December, 1906, Harry Myers, the captain of Keighley N.U.F.C., became the eleventh fatality since the birth of the Northern Union when he died in hospital after sustaining a serious spinal injury from a collision with Dewsbury's forward Fred Richardson.<sup>73</sup> The dangers inherent in rugby can be seen in the injuries from which Myers suffered:

complete paralysis in both legs, the muscles of the abdomen, and the muscles of the chest-wall, and almost complete paralysis of the upper extremities. There was a complete loss of sensation over the whole of the body below the third rib [...] there was a fracture-dislocation between the sixth and seventh pieces of the

<sup>71</sup> *Yorkshire Evening Post*, 09 February, 1907, p.7.

<sup>72</sup> *Halifax Evening Courier*, 11 February, 1907, p.4.

<sup>73</sup> Tony Collins, *Rugby's Great Split*, p.214; *Leeds Mercury*, 22 December, 1906, p.7.

backbone, with complete laceration of the spinal cord [whilst] complications set in – dropsy of the lungs and bronchitis, with septic inflammation of the kidneys and bladder.<sup>74</sup>

Myers was thirty-two years old, had played for Yorkshire and was extremely well thought of in the town. ‘There can be no doubt’, said the *Yorkshire Post*, ‘that his play on the field and his general influence with the team have had much to do with the advance in football status which the Keighley club have experienced in recent years’.<sup>75</sup> As a footballer he was revered: ‘few half backs have shown alertness and resourcefulness in a greater degree than this nimble exponent of the game’, and despite his shortness of stature he ‘took punishment which would have laid out bigger men’.<sup>76</sup> As a man he was considered ‘modest’ with a ‘cheery countenance’ and left behind a devastated family of a widow, Ada, and four young children.<sup>77</sup> On the train to her father’s funeral, one of his daughters, ‘a bonny little lass of four years’ was overheard talking to the relatives in charge of her. “‘Am I going to see daddy?’” she joyously asked, her bright eyes open wide’.<sup>78</sup> Keighley Parish Church was so full that ‘thousands’ had to remain outside during the service, a ‘striking tribute to the dead player’s worth’.<sup>79</sup>

As was usual within the sport, the clubs of the Northern Union instantly set about raising funds to help out Harry’s young family. Local association football clubs, such as Bradford City and Leeds City, also helped with the fundraising.<sup>80</sup> The General Committee of the Northern Union also accepted an application for financial aid for Ada and the

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<sup>74</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 22 December, 1906, p.7.

<sup>75</sup> *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, 20 December, 1906, p.5.

<sup>76</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 20 December, 1906, p.7.

<sup>77</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 20 December, 1906, p.7.

<sup>78</sup> *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, 24 December, 1906, p.11.

<sup>79</sup> *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, 24 December, 1906, p.11.

<sup>80</sup> *Yorkshire Evening Post*, 11 January 1907, p.5; *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, 28 January 1907, p.4.

children, granting a sum of £50 to the family.<sup>81</sup> The arrival of Smut the previous month gave Halifax an excellent fundraising opportunity. When local rivals Leeds visited Thrum Hall on Saturday, February 2<sup>nd</sup>, it promised to be a large gate. It was decided that picture postcards of the Halifax mascot would go on sale to the public to raise money for the Harry Myers Benefit Fund.<sup>82</sup> Two days later the *Leeds Mercury* reported that over eight thousand postcards were sold at the match. The contribution that Smut made to the fund was clear in a short newspaper article, which read as follows:

The following amounts have been forwarded to the above fund from Halifax: collection Keighley match 10s. 9½d., collection Leeds match £6 12s. 9d., from sale of "Black Cat" picture postcards, £6. 18s. 9½d., total £14 2s. 4d. The following letter has been received from the Keighley secretary (Mr. L. Greetham): "We beg to acknowledge receipt of your cheque for £14 2s. 4d. towards the fund for the widow and children of the late Harry Myers, will you kindly express our sincere thanks to all who have contributed to make the donation such a handsome one. I am sure it is most gratifying to receive such a satisfactory response. The black cat deserves a vote to itself, as it has been the means of doubling the amount from your club".<sup>83</sup>

More than just a good luck charm for Halifax, Smut was a way of ensuring that Halifax could raise much-needed money for Ada Myers and her children. Perhaps Smut's true purpose was not one of bringing fortune to the Halifax club, but one of protection, helping to ensure that Ada Myers and her four children were not left fiscally impoverished by the death of their household's chief breadwinner. Whether one believes in the ancient protective powers of the cat or no, one cannot help but wonder at the magic that this ordinary black cat brought with her when she walked into the world of the Halifax club,

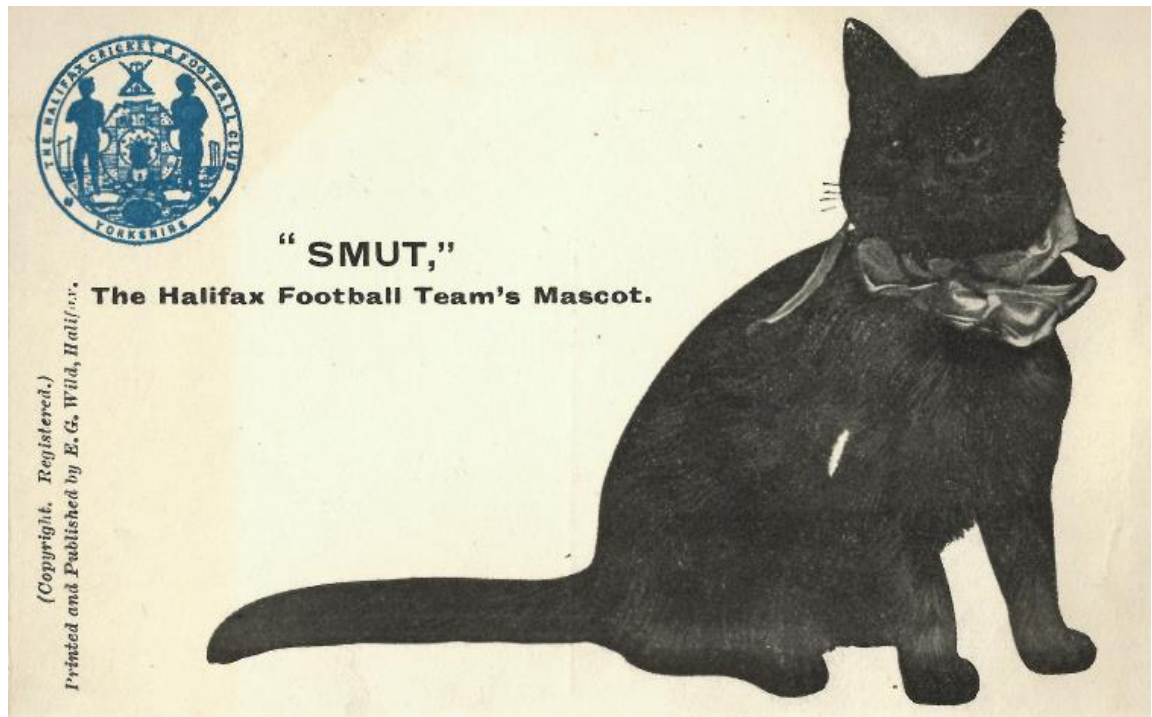
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<sup>81</sup> *Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser*, 09 January, 1907, p.3.

<sup>82</sup> *Halifax Evening Courier*, 31 January, 1907, p.4.

<sup>83</sup> *Halifax Courier*, 09 February, 1907, p.3.

making good on Leonardo da Vinci's assertion that 'the smallest feline is a masterpiece'.<sup>84</sup>



**Figure 9:** One of the Smut postcards issued by the Halifax club to raise money for the Harry Myers Benefit Fund (1907).<sup>85</sup>

## Rugby and the Family

Ada Myers was not alone in being affected by her husband's participation in rugby league and this section will demonstrate how other women were also affected. The women who were the wives, daughters or even widowed mothers of players were often involuntarily as much a part of the game of the male players themselves. Injury on the field, or illness off it, meant that wives and families were fundamentally affected by the fate of their rugby menfolk and left to the mercy of the rugby league community itself. As

<sup>84</sup> Gene Kritsky & Daniel Mader, 'Leonardo's Insects' in *American Entomologist*, Vol. 56, Nº.3 (2010), p.179.

<sup>85</sup> Postcard: author's private collection.

will be shown, sometimes the community showed its strength in support, but at other times that community, on which the sport prided itself, was nowhere to be found.

Whilst “death in service” on the field remained predominantly a rarity, naturally there was a steady flow of widows of those aged players and clubmen who died in more natural circumstances. All clubs would recognise some of those women in their club’s annual reports, especially those married to the more notable or revered personalities. Notes of ‘general sympathy’ would be made, or in some cases collections would be organised at matches with differing results, such as those made for the widows of Jim White and James Geenty at Hull Kingston Rovers in 1907.<sup>86</sup> A collection at Rovers’ match against Oldham on February 9<sup>th</sup> realised £5. 14s. 1d. for Jim White’s widow and family. However, the *Hull Daily Mail* reported on the misfortune of James Geenty, who had played for Hull KR when they won the Yorkshire Cup and Competition in 1897, as he lay ‘seriously ill in the Sculcoates Workhouse, Infirmary’. The paper remarked that ‘it is a sad feature of the unfortunate case that he has a wife and four children dependent on him’.<sup>87</sup> Whether Geenty and his family were ever inmates at the Sculcoates Workhouse one cannot be certain as no admission records survive, but on his death the paper did report his leaving ‘a wife and family in poor circumstances’.<sup>88</sup> By the 1880s the poor were able to use workhouse infirmaries without having been formally admitted to the institution but nonetheless, the dire straits of the family were absolute. Money was found for a funeral at the Spring Bank cemetery, at which ‘six of Kingston Rovers’ old and present players’ acted as bearers of the coffin, and the Rovers club held several collections, including one

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<sup>86</sup> Hull Kingston Rovers F.C. Ltd. Directors’ Report and Balance Sheet, Season 1906-1907.

<sup>87</sup> *Hull Daily Mail*, 07 March, 1907, p.4.

<sup>88</sup> *Hull Daily Mail*, 25 March, 1907, p.5.

on Good Friday carried out by the players themselves, resulting in a total of £17. 3s. 0d. being raised for the family.<sup>89</sup> It can be reasonably concluded that the £12 difference between the collections for the two former players' families was in part because of the awareness of the acute distress of Geenty's surviving family.

The sport's self-image as the community game was sometimes more myth than reality. Not all families of rugby players could rely on the generosity of public support and women remained vulnerable to sudden shifts in the fortunes of their husbands even after their playing careers had ended. The public response to the Geenty family's plight brought to light a new case of hardship, when R. V. Harrison, in a letter published on March 20<sup>th</sup>, told of the terrible circumstances of the family of the former Hull and Hull KR player Joseph Spavieri:

Seeing the public responded so readily to the collection on behalf of J. Geenty I would very much like to draw the attention of the Hull Kingston Rovers Club to the case of J. Spavieri, who paid good service to the Hull and H. K. R. F. C. He is now an inmate of the Willerby Asylum, and his wife and family are on the verge of starvation.<sup>90</sup>

Joseph had been a talented full-back and joined Hull FC in 1891, ending his career at Hull Kingston Rovers in 1898. But for a society preoccupied with male self-discipline Joseph would have been considered something of a scoundrel for his off-field behaviour.<sup>91</sup> A notorious drinker, he was imprisoned for two months in 1896 for being drunk and disorderly and the serious assault of a police officer, whom Joseph struck on the head,

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<sup>89</sup> *Hull Daily Mail*, 27 March, 1907, p.5; Hull Kingston Rovers F.C. Ltd. Directors' Report and Balance Sheet, Season 1906-1907.

<sup>90</sup> *Hull Daily Mail*, 20 March, 1907, p.7.

<sup>91</sup> *Hull Daily Mail*, 20 March, 1907, p.7.

kicked in the legs, threw onto a road and bit on the hand.<sup>92</sup> Sending him down, the judge reminded Joseph ‘that this was not the first time he had been at the Court for assaulting an officer’.<sup>93</sup> Rugby as a method of containment clearly did not work in Spavieri’s case, for in November 1898 he was arrested for fighting at a wedding and fined 2s 6d and ordered to pay costs in a case involving a fight with an ex-policeman in 1903.<sup>94</sup> On December 16<sup>th</sup>, 1906, a thirty-six-year-old Joseph was admitted to the Hull City Asylum, having been found in the city centre acting irrationally whilst dragging a hand-cart of furniture behind him.<sup>95</sup> The arresting officer told the certifying doctor that alongside his history of ‘fighting and resisting the police in their duty’, Joseph had also been ‘very violent to his wife lately and she has had to leave him’.<sup>96</sup> The receiving doctor at the asylum categorised Joseph as dangerous on account of his ‘threatening to kill his wife and children’.<sup>97</sup>

At the time of his admission, Joseph and his wife, Emily, aged twenty-eight, had been married for nine years and produced two children; Annie aged eight and Joseph Martin, a one-year-old babe in arms. The family lived at 14 Belle Vue Terrace, Alexandra Street, near to the centre of the city. The initial diagnosis of Joseph’s condition as General Paralysis of the Insane (GPI) would have had devastating consequences for the circumstances of the young family. GPI ‘was widely perceived as the most deadly disease of psychiatry’, a disease that caused ‘steady and progressive mental and physical

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<sup>92</sup> *Hull Daily Mail*, 07 May, 1896, p.5.

<sup>93</sup> *Hull Daily Mail*, 07 May, 1896, p.5.

<sup>94</sup> *Hull Daily Mail*, 05 December, 1898, p.4; *Hull Daily Mail*, 30 March, 1903, p.3.

<sup>95</sup> Records of the De La Pole Hospital at Hull History Centre: C DPP 153: Male Case Book, Vol.38 (July 1906-1911), p.307-308.

<sup>96</sup> Records of the De La Pole Hospital at Hull History Centre: C DPP 153: Male Case Book, Vol.38 (July 1906-1911), p.308.

<sup>97</sup> Records of the De La Pole Hospital at Hull History Centre: C DPP 153: Male Case Book, Vol.38 (July 1906-1911), p.307.



deterioration ending in death'.<sup>98</sup> As the disease progressed, patients would become mentally facile yet simultaneously display “delusions of grandeur and ideas of morbid expansion or self-satisfaction”.<sup>99</sup> When Joseph entered the asylum he was already displaying the classic symptoms of GPI, his medical notes describing him being incoherently restless and boastful, quoting him as saying:

“I have had two pounds a day, I will have lemonade and pork pie, I am a professional football player and I played five years ago for the Rovers. I have a medal”.<sup>100</sup>

One constant of his condition was that he would often assert that he was ‘able to do anything’ and had ‘never been better or stronger in his life’, whilst in reality his physical movements became ‘awkward and shaky, and speech slurred and hesitating’.<sup>101</sup> Joseph was a typical patient; demographically GPI mainly affected working-class men, and the Royal Edinburgh Asylum noted that it was not “the weaklings and the worthless” that died from the disease, but instead “the most active and energetic”.<sup>102</sup>

The implication for Emily and the children would be one of increased insecurity. The detail and circumstances of Joseph’s violence towards his wife or whether she sought to officially separate from him cannot be ascertained, but the Summary Jurisdiction (Married Women) Act of 1895 would have allowed Emily to officially separate from Joseph, either on the grounds of his two-month prison sentence, or provided that she

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<sup>98</sup> In 1904 there were approximately 2,250 deaths in English asylums from GPI. See Gayle Davis, ‘The Most Deadly Disease of Asylumdom: General Paralysis of the Insane and Scottish Psychiatry, c. 1840-1940’ in *The Journal of the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh*, Vol. 42 (2012), p.266-267.

<sup>99</sup> Quoted in Gayle Davis, ‘The Most Deadly Disease of Asylumdom, p.268.

<sup>100</sup> Records of the De La Pole Hospital at Hull History Centre: C DPP 153: Male Case Book, Vol.38 (July 1906-1911), p.307.

<sup>101</sup> Records of the De La Pole Hospital at Hull History Centre: C DPP 153: Male Case Book, Vol.38 (July 1906-1911), p.309-310.

<sup>102</sup> Quoted in Gayle Davis, ‘The Most Deadly Disease of Asylumdom, p.268.

could prove that she was forced into doing so. Reasons for separation such as a husband's desertion, wilful neglect or persistent physical cruelty had to be proved before a discriminatory magistrate that had 'increasingly [taken] on a paternalistic role' and encouraged reconciliation first and foremost.<sup>103</sup> Some did seek legal separation and in 1907 there were 6,559 joint separation and maintenance orders granted to wives in England and Wales.<sup>104</sup> However, as Iris Minor's work has shown,

the utility of matrimonial laws was undermined by the fact that they were not readily applicable to the domestic affairs and financial resources of the majority of poorer working-class families.<sup>105</sup>

Joseph's violence towards Emily would probably have been tolerated, for evidence has suggested that in working-class families 'various degrees of alcoholism and violence were tolerated by wives no matter how debilitating, provided they felt the husbands had "just cause"'.<sup>106</sup> It is possible that, given Joseph's mental condition, Emily simply accepted Joseph's behaviour as a "just cause" beyond his control. Often in such families, the sticking point would be if a husband turned his violence towards the children, for regardless of his actions towards his wife, a "good husband [...] never "laid a finger on the children"'.<sup>107</sup> Whether Joseph's threats against their children's lives were the catalyst for Emily's leaving her husband cannot be ascertained.

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<sup>103</sup> Kate Lawson & Lynn Shakinovsky, *The Marked Body, Domestic Violence in Mid-Nineteenth-Century Literature*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), p.161; A. James Hammerton, *Cruelty and Companionship: Conflict in Nineteenth-Century Married Life*, (London: Routledge, 1992), p.39.

<sup>104</sup> A. James Hammerton, *Cruelty and Companionship*, p.55.

<sup>105</sup> Iris Minor, 'Working-Class Women and Matrimonial Law Reform, 1890-1914' in *Ideology and the Labour Movement: Essays Presented to John Saville*, (eds.) David E. Martin & David Rubinstein, (London: Croom Helm Ltd., 1979), p.106-107.

<sup>106</sup> Iris Minor, 'Working-Class Women and Matrimonial Law Reform', p.115-116.

<sup>107</sup> Iris Minor, 'Working-Class Women and Matrimonial Law Reform', p.115.

Had Emily sought an official separation prior to Joseph's admission into the asylum, she would have had guaranteed access to some limited form of support from the Hull Board of Guardians that implemented welfare payments under the Poor Law. The Hull Board would then have had the option to seek fiscal redress from Joseph in lieu of the welfare payments given to his wife. However, with Joseph in the asylum, Emily's legal status would have been much more ambiguous, and Emily would be reduced to help from neighbours, family, casual work, charity or the Hull Board of Guardians, where the Poor Law rules would have continued to treat Emily as dependant on her husband. If Emily did apply to the Hull Board it is likely that it would have judged Emily's status as a member of the "deserving poor" as was customary for 'many unions [which] made relief dependent on character or conduct'.<sup>108</sup> Usually, mothers with young children would receive between 2s and 3s per week, and for each child approximately 1s to 1s 6d.<sup>109</sup> What with rental costs and the rising cost of living between 1900 and 1906, such sums were barely adequate and Emily would have struggled to keep her family intact. It is clear that whatever her source of income, she and her children were left destitute and "on the verge of starvation". With the Hull Workhouse only three minutes away and visible from their Belle Vue Terrace home, the threat of further suffering and familial separation loomed large.

Whether Harrison's appeal for help for Emily and the children was fruitful was not reported, nor was any collection reported in the annual report of Hull Kingston Rovers. Given the emphasis on "proper" conduct and a good reputation, one cannot help but

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<sup>108</sup> Pat Thane, 'Women and the Poor Law in Victorian and Edwardian England' in *History Workshop*, N° 6 (1978), p.41.

<sup>109</sup> Pat Thane, 'Women and the Poor Law', p.43.

wonder whether the poor conduct of her husband in his post-football life may have limited the public support for Mrs Spavieri and the children. For Emily, the loss of her husband's income would have been devastating and irretrievable once his diagnosis had been confirmed. Only Joseph's inevitable death could release her from her marriage and all its emotional and financial consequences. His decline was slow and difficult, occurring over the twenty-four months after his admission. By September 1908, Joseph had begun to show signs of paranoia and increasingly had to be kept in bed to prevent his hurting himself. A month before his death the doctor declared him to be 'quite incoherent, knocking himself about and nothing can be done with him' and had begun administering sedatives to force him into sleep.<sup>110</sup> Finally, at 7:15am on December 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1908, thirty-eight-year-old Joseph Spavieri died in the Hull City Asylum and after a post-mortem confirmed the cause of death as GPI, was buried in grave number forty-seven in the hospital cemetery on December 26<sup>th</sup>.<sup>111</sup> Emily and her children survived, and Emily remarried in 1911. Her children eventually took on the surname of her second husband, William Henry Ramm, who on the first anniversary of her death in 1949 posted a notice in the *Hull Daily Mail* declared that she was 'our darling mother' and 'dearer than riches or gold'.<sup>112</sup> The Spavieri family story illustrates the potentially precarious life of the wives and families of rugby players. Gender relationships were not merely defined by attitudes towards women, but by the very nature of the relationships of rugby itself.

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<sup>110</sup> Records of the De La Pole Hospital at Hull History Centre: C DPP 153: Male Case Book, Vol.38 (July 1906-1911), p.312.

<sup>111</sup> Records of the De La Pole Hospital at Hull History Centre: C DPP 77: Burial Registers, 1907-1942 (microfiche), 26 December, 1908.

<sup>112</sup> *Hull Daily Mail*, 02 June, 1950, p.2.

Thankfully for those involved, many players did understand the precarious nature of their careers and sought to look after the women in their lives. In 1910, St Helens' Tommy Barton was selected to go on the first England tour of Australia and New Zealand. Whilst the Northern Union would pay supplementary wages to wives of touring players, Barton was unmarried and lived with his mother, who relied on her son's income from his regular employment for sustenance. When the Northern Union refused to agree make up Barton's wages to his mother whilst he was on tour, he refused to go.<sup>113</sup> The Northern Union's limited definition of dependent family lost the England team one of its key players, and failed to recognise the unseen contribution Mother Barton would have made to her son's playing career. Despite not being a wife, she would have facilitated his career in much the same way, cooking, keeping house and doing what she was able to support him in his work. In return, Barton supported his mother and put his obligation to her and their household before the glory of obtaining international honours in the southern hemisphere. Despite his refusal to travel, Barton was committed to the sport. When St. Helens reached the final of the Challenge Cup in 1915 and faced Huddersfield's "team of all talents", right before the match the players discovered that they would not receive a bonus if they lifted the famous trophy and consequently many refused to play. Barton, who was captain, gave a rousing speech, reminding them all that their medals alone would be worth £3 regardless of whether they won the match: "I am not going back without mine – even if I have to turn out and play Huddersfield myself!" he told them.<sup>114</sup> Barton was as devoted to the game as he was to his mother, and his mother's plight

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<sup>113</sup> Alex Service, *Saints in their Glory*, p.61.

<sup>114</sup> Alex Service, *Saints in their Glory*, p.76.

reinforces the role that women played in the sport in the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries; the domestic, supporting role in the masculine kingdom.

It was not just players' wives and mothers who carried out these supporting functions. Wives of referees and committee men would also make personal sacrifices in order that their menfolk could operate within the sport. Some of these women were thanked by those organisations in which their husbands operated, as was one Mrs Wood, wife of the referee J. W. Wood. At a meeting of the Yorkshire Society of N.U. Referees on December 21<sup>st</sup>, 1904 the chair 'presented Mr. J. W. Wood, the late secretary of the society, with a Chippendale silver cabinet – on behalf of his wife – a diamond and pearl pin, and a silver match box'.<sup>115</sup> Such rewards were not always material, but ceremonial, as we have seen in the presenting of trophies. In the case of Mrs Preston, wife of Dewsbury club President Charles Preston, it came in the form of a different honour, the laying of the foundation stone for the new stand at Crown Flatt, Dewsbury in 1914. The stone's inscription memorialised her and, as was the case with the naming of married women at the time, whereby they were known by their husbands' identity and their own forenames were not recorded by the press, also marked her out as the property of her distinguished husband. The stone read 'This stone was laid by Mrs Charles Preston, August 8<sup>th</sup>, 1914'.<sup>116</sup> Women who were not married or related to players and officials were also facilitators within rugby, such as one 'lady', Mrs Scott, who in 1868 gave permission for a meeting to take place in her home in Newington Place, York, where seven 'old York boys' gathered

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<sup>115</sup> Yorkshire Society of Referees (Northern Union), Minutes of the Ordinary Meeting, 21 December, 1904.

<sup>116</sup> 'Farewell to Crown Flatt', Dewsbury v Barrow match day programme, 14 April, 1991.

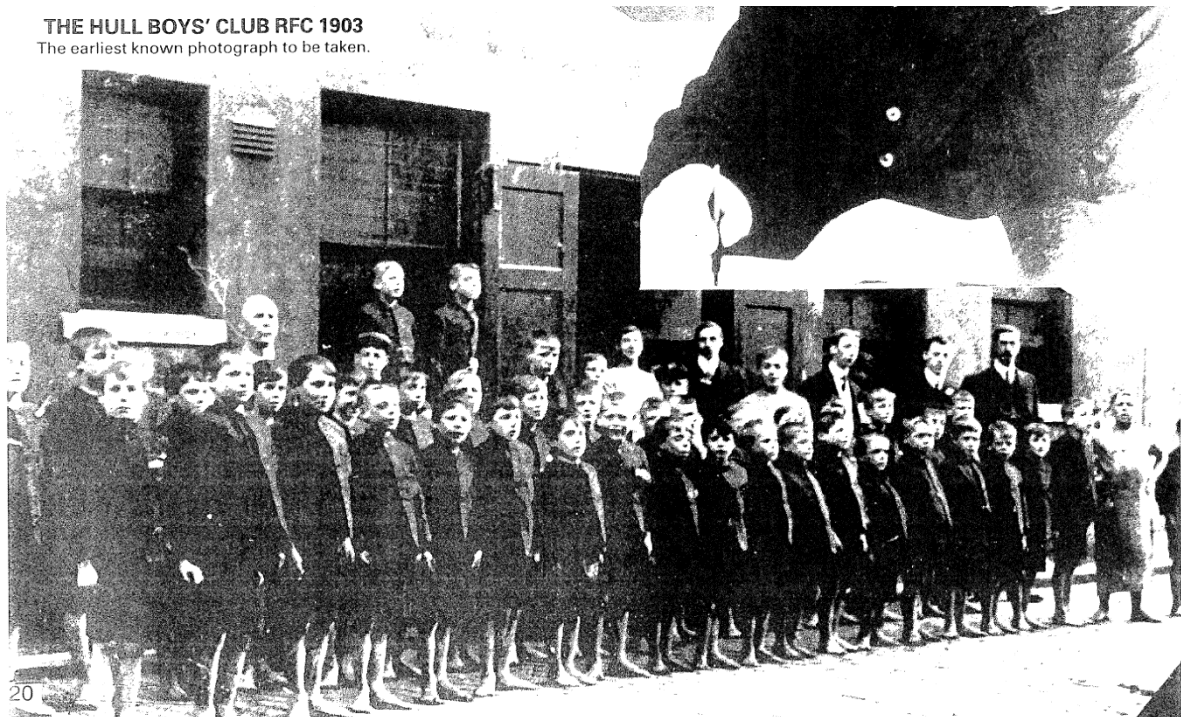
‘for the purpose of forming a rugby football club for York’.<sup>117</sup> Passive and practical support was the most-common way for women to be involved in rugby league, even if they were not interested in the sport *per se*. In the early twentieth century, club fundraising events began to be organised regularly, such as the one organised by St Helens in February 1908, when a whist drive and dance was held to celebrate a visit from the New Zealand All Blacks. Such a visit was a source of civic pride and the St Helens club would have wanted to take advantage of the occasion, by giving local dignitaries and businessmen a rare opportunity to meet and talk with the celebrated New Zealand players whilst raising money for the club. Tickets were priced within range of those more affluent patrons at ‘half-a-crown for gents, two shillings for ladies. Double tickets proved popular at five bob each’.<sup>118</sup> These events would foster a sense of community amongst those whom the club relied on for patronage and were an integral part of the mechanism by which the clubs functioned. Smaller events would also be held at local public houses in the community, such as Featherstone’s evening at the Railway Hotel in June 1910, at the invitation of Mr and Mrs C. Umpleby.<sup>119</sup> For landladies and landlords, fostering a good relationship with a football club could be fiscally savvy, as the club would use their premises to hold annual and general meetings and medal presentations, often free of rent but paying for catering services.

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<sup>117</sup> *Yorkshire Evening Post*, 23 February, 1901, p.3.

<sup>118</sup> Alex Service, *Saints in their Glory*, p.54.

<sup>119</sup> Ian Clayton, *100 Years of Featherstone Rugby*, p.28.



**Figure 10:** Hull Boys' Club RFC (1903).<sup>120</sup>

This supporting role, providing an almost maternal strength to male players, can be seen in what is perhaps the earliest surviving photograph of a woman with a rugby club, which shows an unidentified woman standing with the Hull Boys' Club RFC, taken in 1903. Seen on the far right of the picture, she is working-class by appearance and is standing with her hands on her hips and her feet apart, quite unlike the boys, who are standing with their heels together. With elbows pointing outwards she takes up more space than the men in the image; her stance is a powerful one and suggestive of an assertiveness in her character, a strong woman ready for action, deeply involved in supporting the endeavours of the men and the boys, evoking the role held by Isabella Boardman. Analysing her dress, it is likely that the woman was some form of domestic worker, but whatever her function, that she was included in the photograph signifies that

<sup>120</sup> *Humberside Rugby League Focus*, Vol. 2, Nº 7, 1988, p.20.



she was integral to the workings of the club in some way and not simply a passive bystander.

### Rugby and the “Spoil-Sport Suffragettes”

One group of women who came in contact with rugby league were the opposite of facilitators, proving that rugby was not immune from the political forces of the time. The suffragettes, as Joyce Kay has highlighted, attacked sporting institutions as symbols of male dominance, and as one of the masculine sports, rugby league attracted the growing attention of the movement.<sup>121</sup> This new exploration will focus on the previously untold circumstances of the suffragettes’ single foray into in rugby league territory.

It was 10:15 PM on November 24<sup>th</sup>, 1913, when PC George Barlow was making the familiar patrol round Headingley’s athletic grounds. Home to Leeds Cricket, Football and Athletic Club, the twenty-two acre development that had opened in 1889 was a source of civic pride: built to offer ““unrivalled accommodation to all classes of spectators”” it was a supreme beacon of sport in West Yorkshire.<sup>122</sup> PC Barlow walked round the rugby stands, but as he approached the popular seven-and-sixpenny stand, that on a match day held up to two-thousand spectators, he was halted by an unusual noise coming from the darkness. He dimmed his lamp and stole quietly to the room on the left hand side of the stand’s

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<sup>121</sup> Joyce Kay, ‘It Wasn’t Just Emily Davison! Sport, Suffrage and Society in Edwardian Britain’ in *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, Vol. 25, Nº 10 (2008), p. 1338-1354.

<sup>122</sup> Leeds Cricket, Football and Athletic Company Limited, *Annual Report and Accounts*, year ending 30 April 1891, quoted in Tony Collins, *Rugby’s Great Split: Class, Culture and the Origins of Rugby League Football*, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006), p.85.

entrance. Within, he found two women, one stooping with match in hand, about to commit a very serious arson.<sup>123</sup>

“‘What a quiet spot! I did not think any policeman would come round here,’” remarked the match-holder, twenty-six-year-old Clara Giveen, as she saw the intruding police officer. PC Barlow demanded to know whether they had lit their intended fire, to which Clara replied “‘I only wish we had’”.<sup>124</sup> The constable ‘dragged’ both her and her accomplice, Hilda Burkitt, out from underneath the stand and, blowing his whistle, alerted the groundsman, who arrived quickly at the scene.<sup>125</sup> Both women were ‘quiet, and did not struggle’ during their apprehension, and even remained composed as members of the football club committee, fresh from a meeting held nearby, gathered to investigate the source of the commotion. They were horrified at what they saw:

A huge quantity of cotton wool soaked with petrol and other inflammable liquids had been laid beside the woodwork under the stand, and oil had been poured over the surrounding timber. A second fire had been arranged for on the top of the entrance gangway. A big quantity of soaked cotton wool was lying about, evidently ready for kindling.<sup>126</sup>

This was not merely the work of petty criminals. This was the work of that highly organised, well-trained group of fearless women who would stop at nothing to achieve their aims: the suffragettes. The football committee members were ‘naturally very much incensed’ at the women and did not hold back from expressing their anger.<sup>127</sup> However,

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<sup>123</sup> *The Times*, 26 November, 1913, p.12.

<sup>124</sup> *Yorkshire Evening Post*, 25 November, 1913, p.5.

<sup>125</sup> *Yorkshire Evening Post*, 25 November, 1913, p.5.

<sup>126</sup> *Yorkshire Evening Post*, 25 November, 1913, p.5.

<sup>127</sup> *Yorkshire Evening Post*, 25 November, 1913, p.5.

the men were insouciantly advised “not to be vexed” by the perpetrators, who were subsequently led to Headingley Police Station and detained.<sup>128</sup>

Their reason for specifically choosing Headingley has never been explicitly stated, but one can surmise that because the stadium held significant male cultural importance in the area that it was an obvious target. What is clear is that it was one incident in a wider campaign against sporting facilities that the militant suffragettes began in the February of that year, as part of their response to the British Cabinet voting for the removal of the twentieth Franchise and Registration Bill from consideration in the Commons, that once again denied the possibility of extending the franchise to women.<sup>129</sup> The Liberal Prime Minister, Mr. H. H. Asquith, and several of his cabinet members had endured a number of confrontations with suffragettes whilst playing golf, but this was the first time that a campaign had been made against sporting infrastructure.<sup>130</sup> On February 7<sup>th</sup>, 1913, the Women’s Social and Political Union (WSPU) newspaper, *Votes for Women*, reported that golf courses in Birmingham had been deliberately spoiled. Greens were torn, and on some their principal message, “Votes for Women”, was written on the turf with acid, which

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<sup>128</sup> *Yorkshire Evening Post*, 25 November, 1913, p.5.

<sup>129</sup> Joyce Kay, ‘It Wasn’t Just Emily Davison!’, p.1341.

<sup>130</sup> Examples of such confrontations include an incident at Littlestone Golf Links, near Folkstone, on 07 September, 1909, when the Home Secretary, Herbert Gladstone, was struck by three women who had a basket containing pieces of rope tied into nooses (*Derby Daily Telegraph*, 07 September, 1909, p.4), and another on 1912, when on Dornoch Links Mr. Asquith and the Home Secretary Reginald McKenna were verbally tackled on the ninth green by Miss Mitchell and Miss Howie, two suffragettes from Aberdeen. The humorous account in the *Dundee Courier* (12 September, 1912, p.5) described how the Prime Minister initially hid behind McKenna, who roughly-handled the women and threatened to throw both women into a nearby pond. Only then did Asquith find the courage to take hold of one of the women himself. However, neither woman appeared to pose any physical threat to the men, instead they only wished to debate the suffrage question with the pair. See also *American Golfer*, Vol. 9 № 1 (November 1912), for a particularly patronising report of the incident by its British correspondent.

seared the grass irrecoverably.<sup>131</sup> *The Standard* asked ‘what sport or pastime is safe if such tactics are adopted?’ and quoted one ‘prominent golfer’ who felt that the suffragette attacks had implication for the very future of humanity:

Such activities [...] are as disgusting as they are incomprehensible. Golf is essentially a game that brings into play mental faculties, such as powers of observation, that make for the betterment of the race.<sup>132</sup>

What could be more shocking than women, the very carriers of the future race, putting that very race in jeopardy? The golfer went on to say:

Breaking the windows of Government buildings is bad; the crusade against the panes of business houses is worse, but the attack on one of the most necessary and delightful sports of the people is the worst of all.<sup>133</sup>

His placing of the damage of courses as “worst of all” in the hierarchy of evils is an example of how much importance sport now had in the cultural landscape of the nation. To cause disruption to, and commit willful damage against the property and machinations of state, or against businesses throughout the country, is preferable to such that disturbs the individual leisure time of a percentage of the, mostly male, middle-classes.<sup>134</sup>

One of the perpetrators of the Headingley attack, Hilda Burkitt, a secretary by trade, hailed from Birmingham. She joined the WSPU in 1907 and when the Birmingham regional WSPU office opened in 1908, at the age of 31, she became its publicity manager.<sup>135</sup> Hilda was an active militant and by the time she was arrested in Leeds she

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<sup>131</sup> *Votes for Women*, 7 February, 1913, p.274.

<sup>132</sup> *The Standard*, 03 February, 1913, p.9.

<sup>133</sup> *The Standard*, 03 February, 1913, p.9.

<sup>134</sup> ‘while golf clubs tolerated female participants they forced them to abide by male rules and rendered them second-class citizens of the links – as they were the state’: Joyce Kay. ‘It Wasn’t Just Emily Davison!’, p.1346.

<sup>135</sup> Elizabeth Crawford, *The Women’s Suffrage Movement: A Reference Guide, 1866-1928*, (London: UCL Press, 1999), p.87.

had already been imprisoned twice. The Headingley arson attempt was timed to coincide with a visit to the city by Mr. Asquith, who arrived in Leeds three days later, on 27<sup>th</sup> November, to give a speech to the National Liberal Federation annual conference. Hilda Burkitt was an ideal candidate as had a great deal of form in responding to visits by Mr. Asquith. On September 17<sup>th</sup>, 1909, during the Prime Minister's visit to Birmingham's Bingley Hall, Hilda and the local WSPU adopted 'methods of violence far exceeding anything that had gone before', to the delight of the central WSPU, who reported gleefully 'it is impossible in cold print to do justice to the vigour and magnitude of the demonstration, which exceeded anything previously achieved by the WSPU outside the metropolis'.<sup>136</sup> Birmingham was a thriving site of effective militancy and it is from this hotbed that Hilda Burkett operated. At 10:30pm, Asquith boarded the train at New Street Station, where Hilda was seen throwing an iron bar at the train, smashing a window. She was arrested immediately.<sup>137</sup> In court, Hilda was sentenced to one month in Winson Green Gaol and immediately initiated a hunger-strike. However, Hilda's imprisonment would mark a cruel turning point in the history of the women's movement: the government declared that force-feeding was "legitimate" hospital treatment and Hilda became the first woman to undergo the procedure, which the WSPU lambasted as a 'horrible assault perpetrated by the Government'.<sup>138</sup> Such ill-treatment did nothing to quell her militancy, which lasted until 1914, by which point she had been forcibly fed a total of two-hundred-and-ninety-two times during her four stints in prison.<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> *Votes for Women*, 01 October, 1909, p.5; *Votes for Women*, 24 September, 1909, p.1206.

<sup>137</sup> *Votes for Women*, 24 September, 1909, pp.1206-1210; *Votes for Women*, 01 October, 1909, p.5.

<sup>138</sup> *Votes for Women*, 01 October, 1909, p.1-2; Crawford, Elizabeth 1999. 'Burkitt, [Evelyn] Hilda' in *The Women's Suffrage Movement: A Reference Guide, 1866-1928*, London: UCL Press, pp.87-88.

<sup>139</sup> Elizabeth Crawford, *The Women's Suffrage Movement*, pp.87-88.

Although eleven years younger than Hilda at the time of the Headingley incident, her collaborator, Clara Giveen, also brought her own significant experience to the proceedings. Born in Coleraine, she was first arrested on Black Friday, November 18<sup>th</sup>, 1910. Black Friday was her first taste of suffragette protest, but it would not be her last, and she devoted herself to militant action. She, along with the actress Kitty Marion, instigated what Joyce Kay surmises the ‘most devastating’ militant action on a sporting infrastructure during the campaign.<sup>140</sup> Late in the evening of June 8<sup>th</sup>, 1913, Clara and Kitty approached the cricket pitch that neighboured Hurst Park racecourse, Molesey, Surrey, not far from Hampton Court.<sup>141</sup> The women found their way into the grandstand and set about arson. When the fire was detected it had already taken hold. It took six fire crews from neighbouring stations an hour to put out the flames, but the damage had been done and the impact was extensive.<sup>142</sup> In court the prosecution lawyer said ‘the fire was a most complete one, and the damage done amounted to £10,000’.<sup>143</sup> No attack on any sporting establishment had been so successful in wreaking such destruction.<sup>144</sup> Clara and Kitty were found guilty and each were sentenced to three years’ imprisonment at Holloway Prison. Having commenced a hunger strike, Clara was released from Holloway Prison on July 10<sup>th</sup> under the auspices of the Cat-and-Mouse Act, having served only seven days of her sentence.<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> Joyce Kay, ‘It Wasn’t Just Emily Davison!’, p.1343.

<sup>141</sup> Elizabeth Crawford, ‘Suffrage Stories: Kitty Marion, Emily Wilding Davison and Hurst Park’, *Women and her Sphere*. 04 June, 2013. Available: <https://womanandhersphere.com/2013/06/07/suffrage-stories-kitty-marion-emily-wilding-davison-and-hurst-park/> [Accessed: 04 December, 2014].

<sup>142</sup> *Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser*, 09 June, 1913, p.10.

<sup>143</sup> *Yorkshire Evening Post*, 11 June, 1913, p.5.

<sup>144</sup> See ‘Table 1: Suffragette Damage to Sports Venues, April-December 1913’ in <sup>144</sup> Joyce Kay, ‘It Wasn’t Just Emily Davison!’, p.1343. Kay’s research discovered that the next most-expensive incident was the destruction of the boathouse at Hampton Court, whose damage was valued at £3,500.

<sup>145</sup> *Derby Daily Telegraph*, 10 July, 1913, p.3.

Both Hilda Burkitt and Clara Giveen had *form*. They were uncompromising and militant suffragettes who were committed to the “propaganda of the deed”. When they arrived at Headingley that November night, together they had enough experience and expertise in acts of militancy that they had every chance of creating another fire as devastating as the one that took down Hurst Park. Headingley’s stature was only surpassed by the Old Trafford cricket ground for the title of best sporting facility in the north of England and its growing importance to sport was clear: it had been the home of Yorkshire County Cricket Club since 1890 and a test-match venue since 1899. For rugby football, it had been a Challenge Cup venue since the competition’s inception in 1896, a tournament set up to rival the Football Association Cup and the first national competition for clubs of any rugby code. Headingley was so significant a facility to rugby league that it hosted the first two Challenge Cup finals and had held nine of the eighteen finals that had occurred prior to the women’s attempted arson.<sup>146</sup> Had they been successful, the loss to the local teams and to sport as a whole, would have been immense.

Joyce Kay asserts that ‘without adequate evidence it is impossible to show conclusively that the militants deliberately targeted male sport’.<sup>147</sup> However, from the media coverage of the Hurst Park fire we do know that it was felt at the time that the attacks on sport were a calculated tactic employed by the movement:

In view of the energetic manner in which the militant Suffragettes have pursued their campaign of destruction, *particularly in the way of firing houses or erections in connection*

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<sup>146</sup> This includes one replay in the 1909-10 season, held at Huddersfield’s Fartown, which was the next-favoured venue with a total three finals hosted. A total of 200,587 spectators had attended a final at Headingley during this period.

<sup>147</sup> Joyce Kay, ‘It Wasn’t Just Emily Davison!’, p.1346.

*with sport*, added to certain clues left behind there seems little or no doubt that these wild women are responsible for a great fire at Hurst Park Racecourse, Hampton Court, this morning. [my emphasis]<sup>148</sup>

These “wild women” of the WSPU had also called for action against institutions that catered for men. Sport at this time was one of the most prominent “masculine monopolies”, and much money was poured into the [industry], which in itself could have a detrimental affect on women’s lives, especially if a family had very little income. Men’s leisure was more often than not a priority over that of women, overwhelmingly so in working-class households where any money spent on the sporting pursuits of a husband would have an adverse affect on the household budget, which was the primary concern of wife:

Practically ever masculine monopoly is supported by women’s money. Suffragists must see to it that the support is withdrawn, and that it is placed where it will promote the cause of sex-equality. The day is gone by when we beg for our rights; let us organise and take them.<sup>149</sup>

This call for action, when placed into context with the perception within the media, adds weight to the argument that the targetting of sport and sporting institutions as “masculine monopolies” was a deliberate tactic used by the militant suffragettes as part of its campaign to achieve the franchise for women.

This may have been the suffragettes only foray into rugby league territory, but the rugby league press repaid the “compliment” by using the prevailing stereotypes of suffragettes as tools in their commentary of the sport. Perhaps the most interesting

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<sup>148</sup> *Sheffield Evening Telegraph*, 09 June, 1913, p.5.

<sup>149</sup> *Votes for Women*, 28 November, 1913, p.123.



example of this is a cartoon by R. W. Lawson that appeared in a Hull paper on Saturday, March 14<sup>th</sup>, 1914:



**Figure 11:** Cartoon satirising the attack on *The Toilet of Venus*, by R. W. Lawson, 1914.<sup>150</sup>

The cartoon appropriates imagery from an infamous incident that had happened just four days earlier. On the morning of March 10<sup>th</sup>, 1914, the militant suffragette Mary Richardson, a member of the WSPU since 1909, entered the National Gallery in London and stood before the c.1647 masterpiece *The Toilet of Venus* (also known as the *Rokeby Venus*) by one of the most significant painters of the Spanish Golden Age, Diego

<sup>150</sup> 'Huddersfield Rugby League Heritage Scrapbook, 1913-1915', in Huddersfield Past Players' Association Archive held in trust at The University of Huddersfield. My thanks go to David Thorpe for the informing me of the whereabouts of this cartoon image.

Velázquez.<sup>151</sup> There were two police constables and several visitors in the vicinity, but when one police constable left the room to go for his lunch break, she seized her moment. She took out a small axe that had been hidden up her sleeve and began her violent protest.<sup>152</sup> The initial blow smashed the thick glass protecting the canvas and in the following few seconds she managed to slash the canvas six or seven times, 'and by one of them a piece about the size of half a crown was cut out'.<sup>153</sup>



**Figure 12:** The Toilet of Venus, Diego Velázquez.<sup>154</sup>

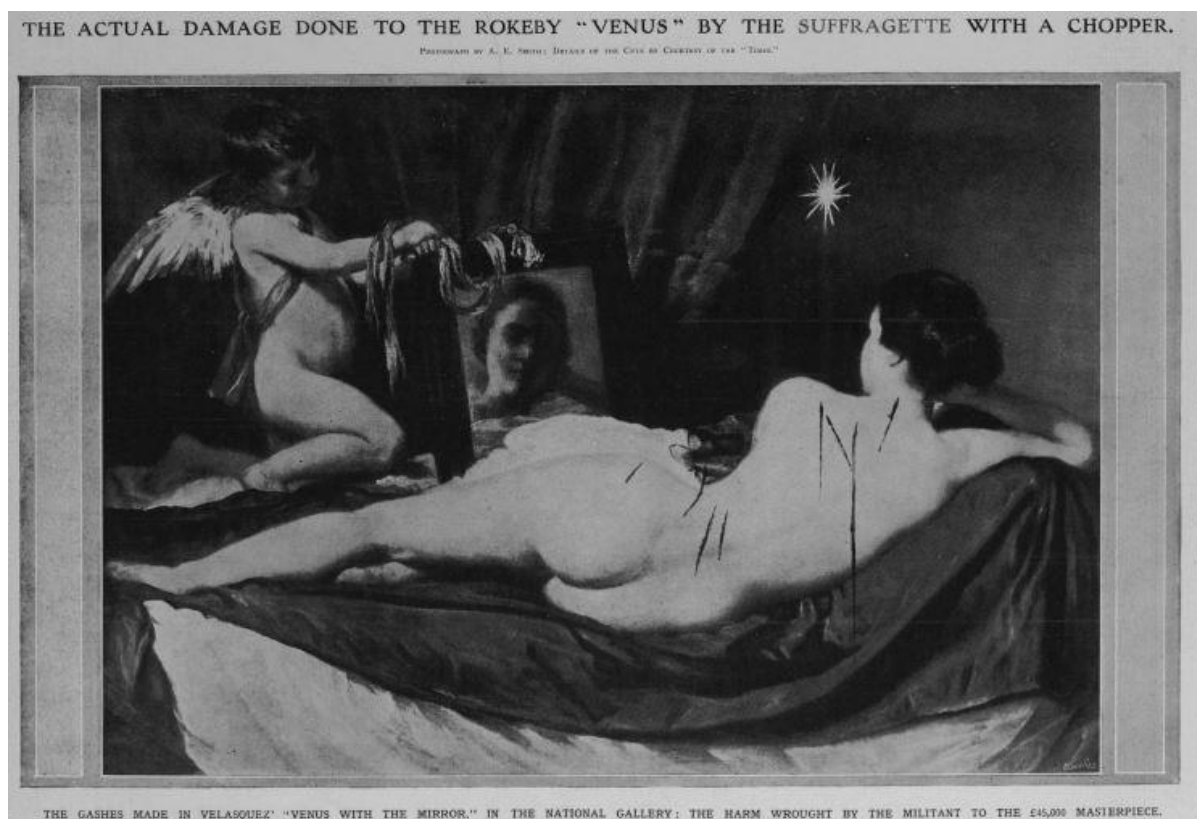
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<sup>151</sup> Elizabeth Crawford, *The Women's Suffrage Movement*, p.94.

<sup>152</sup> Mary R. Richardson, *Laugh A Defiance*, (London: George Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1953), p.167.

<sup>153</sup> *Birmingham Mail*, 10 March, 1914, p.6.

<sup>154</sup> Diego Velázquez, *The Toilet of Venus*. c.1647 [Oil on canvas]. The National Gallery, London.



**Figure 13:** The damage can be seen across the body of Venus.<sup>155</sup>

The attack on the painting dominated the news and had wider resonance and found its way into the discussion of rugby league. Lawson's cartoon depicted Mary Richardson attacking an image that mimics *The Toilet of Venus* but has a rugby league twist. In place of the mythological Venus lies a Huddersfield player, gazing into a mirror held by the Northern Union Cupid. The suffragette is holding a flag emblazoned with the words 'Honour For Rovers', referring to the paper's local side Hull Kingston Rovers. Given the caption underneath the image which 'hopes that the Huddersfield record has been slashed a bit to-day!', at first the cartoon appears to be a witty appropriation of current events to make a point about the day's Northern Union Challenge Cup match at Rovers' Craven Street ground. Huddersfield were the darlings of the Northern Union; their "team of all talents" were the reigning League Championship winners and current holders of the

<sup>155</sup> *Illustrated London News*, 14 March, 1914, p.5.

Challenge Cup, having beaten Warrington 9-5 in what was their first ever appearance in a Challenge Cup final.<sup>156</sup> They were the team that everyone wanted to beat and as such Huddersfield were a formidable opponent for Rovers. Its wit, however, remains on the surface and closer analysis of the cartoon reveals a much more interesting social commentary.

Firstly, the image of the Velázquez has become the “NU Venus” and the ideal beauty and physical femininity has been replaced by the player’s epitomic masculine, athletic beauty. If, as Gamboni states,

Mary Richardson turned Venus, a symbol of (physical) beauty, an ideal of (passive) womanhood and a voluptuous object of (male) contemplation, into an inverted Emmeline Pankhurst, a model of moral beauty, emancipated womanhood and political militancy [asserting] the superiority of her positive model

then the cartoonist, Lawson, has himself turned the Huddersfield player into a symbol of physical, ideal masculinity; a superior object of male contemplation for thousands of rugby league spectators.<sup>157</sup> The adoration with which the Northern Union Cupid looks at the player, and that of the viewer, reproduces on an intimate level the action of the spectatorship in the stands on a match day. The player, himself part of the local community, looks back at the viewer through the medium of the mirror, cementing their mutual affinities by showing them something of themselves, their own worth being reflected back at them by his achievements on the pitch.

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<sup>156</sup> *Yorkshire Evening Post*, 26 April, 1913, p.8.

<sup>157</sup> Dario Gamboni, *The Destruction of Art: Iconoclasm and Vandalism Since the French Revolution*, (London: Reaktion Books Ltd., 1997), pp.96-97.

Secondly, the magnificence of the player is contrasted heavily with the deprecating grotesque of the “Craven Street Suffragette”, who is dressed in a similarly fashionable tailored coat and skirt as those worn by Mary Richardson, but with the addition of trousers that at the time were mostly worn by men alone. This skirt and trousers duality gives the figure an air of androgyny, asserting the common notion that suffragettes rejected their femininity and wanted to be like men.<sup>158</sup> Her hag-like face, which harbours a large nose and pointed, broken teeth renders her as both unwomanly and unpleasant and whilst the elongated American-Indian-style feathers in her hat symbolise power and freedom, they also mark her as tribal and “other”, whilst the skull hanging from her belt signifies her witch-like evil. She is a sexually ambiguous woman, akin to the witches in *Macbeth* for whom ‘fair is foul, and foul is fair’; she defies her gender, bringing trouble to men with her aggressive, physical violence.<sup>159</sup> The forceful, socially-unacceptable, bodily action of the female suffragette is juxtaposed with the passive inaction of the luxuriating player, for whom such physicality is only acceptable on the pitch, where it is a laudable demonstration of exquisite, acceptable, perfect masculinity. Whilst the suffragette is calling for honour for Hull Kingston Rovers, asserting the “superiority of her positive model” in a display of local loyalty, that superiority is undermined by her action and turned into one of bastardised, abhorrent femininity consumed with jealousy and spite towards the prevailing narrative of masculine beauty and excellence on the rugby field.

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<sup>158</sup> Marie Mulvey-Roberts & Tamae Mizuta, *The Militants: Suffragette Activism*, (London: Routledge/Thoemmes Press, 1994), p.104.

<sup>159</sup> William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, (ed.) Kenneth Muir, (London: Thomson Learning, [1606] 2006), l.i.12.

The beauty of the sport was inevitably to be spoiled with the onset of war, despite the slow response by the Northern Union to respond to its demands and its decision to continue playing throughout the 1914-15 season. Gate receipts tumbled, and on October 20<sup>th</sup>, 1914, clubs voted to implement a unilateral wage cut of twenty-five per cent for players and referees.<sup>160</sup> As this chapter has discussed, the issue of players' incomes was important to their families, who relied on their wages for sustenance, and the interruption by the war effort to some working-class occupations, such as those in the textile industry, was already squeezing family finances. Many players revolted against the decision and on Saturday November 7<sup>th</sup> those from Halifax, Huddersfield, Oldham, Rochdale and Wigan went on strike, with others at Bradford and York playing under protest.<sup>161</sup> By the end of November, under pressure from players and clubs, the committee voted that the issue of wage reductions were left for clubs and individual players to privately resolve.<sup>162</sup> The season came to an end with the 1915 Challenge Cup Final and all play was suspended for the duration of the war, with many clubs in fiscal difficulty having operated at substantial losses, such as Hull Kingston Rovers who reported a deficit of £525. 11s. 10d. This working-class rebellion against cut-price labour, a sporting reflection of the "Great Labour Unrest" of 1910-14, twinned with the suffragettes' brand of middle-class militancy against gender roles and male dominance signified what was to come, anticipating the changes in society that would take place after World War One. Like all aspects of culture, rugby league would not be immune from those changes.

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<sup>160</sup> Tony Collins, *Rugby League in Twentieth-Century Britain*, p.12.

<sup>161</sup> Tony Collins, *Rugby League in Twentieth-Century Britain*, p.13.

<sup>162</sup> Tony Collins, *Rugby League in Twentieth-Century Britain*, p.13.

## Conclusion

This chapter has sought to expand the field of enquiry of gender and sport history. Traditional historians of gender and sport have viewed the issue as simply one of women's direct participation in sporting activity as participants. However, as this chapter has demonstrated, women's involvement in sport amounted to far more than merely playing. It encompassed an extensive range of supporting roles, both voluntary, and in the case of players' families, involuntary. Moreover, as the suffragettes understood, sport also had tremendous symbolic power in the maintenance of the gender order. Prior to World War One, women had been ever-present within rugby league. On a conscious level, women had made attempts to play, cheered from the stands and been involved in crucial supporting roles. Every woman who had any connection to a player or administrator was involved in the sport on some level, some actively and some with more passivity. As their husbands, sons, fathers and brothers operated actively within the sport, rugby league permeated women's lives on a deeper level than those previously documented, and the same applies to women with connections to other sports. Women with connections to players were intrinsically involved because the bodily risk borne by the men instigated a risk to those women's lives, in practical and economic terms as well as emotionally, as they risked not only familial break down but also the loss of human life. This chapter has demonstrated the need to question the concept of community when it comes to sport. Rugby league, like most sports, likes to think of itself as part of the community, but history clearly shows that for every woman whose husband was injured and received support, there was another who got little, if any, community support from the game.

## Chapter Three: “Ours is a man’s game that women have not yet attempted”: Women on the Field in Rugby and Soccer in the 1920s

From 1917 to 1922 women played soccer in Britain in unprecedented numbers.<sup>1</sup> In Britain, the most notable example was the rise of Dick, Kerr’s Ladies’ Football Club from a culture of women’s charity soccer. But many of the centres of women’s soccer being in the rugby-playing towns of the industrial north, rugby league remained resistant to women playing the game.<sup>2</sup> This chapter explores the rise of women’s soccer and examines in relation to the lack of women’s involvement in rugby league. The short-termism of women’s soccer is discussed in the context of the temporary cultural shift that occurred as women’s employment opportunities changed during World War One, and of the return to the status quo of expected motherhood and domesticity after its cessation. It will be argued that the motivations behind women’s soccer, raising money for war charities, provided no fundamental challenge to the traditional gender order, sustaining men and the nation at war.

The lucrative precedent set during the war saw the reprise of women’s soccer for the miners’ strikes of 1920 and 1921, and a case study of women apparently playing

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<sup>1</sup> This pattern that was also repeated with both rugby league and union in New Zealand and Australian Rules football in Australia. See Barbara Cox, ‘The Rise and Fall of “The Girl Footballer” in New Zealand during 1921’ in *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, Vol. 29, Nº 3 (2012), pp.444-471; Katherine Haines, ‘The 1921 Peak and Turning Point in Women’s Football History: An Australasian, Cross-Code Perspective’ in *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, Vol. 31, Nº 18 (2016), pp.828-846. Rob Hess, ‘Missing in Action? New Perspectives on the Origins and Diffusion of Women’s Football in Australia during the Great War’ in *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, Vol. 31, Nº 18 (YEAR), pp.2326-2344, “‘What a Freak Show they Made!’: Women’s Rugby League in 1920s Sydney’, *Football Studies*, Vol. 4, Nº 2 (2001), pp.25-40.

<sup>2</sup> Dick, Kerr and Company was a manufacturer of electrical equipment and locomotives. Dick, Kerr’s Ladies’ Football Club was made up of women employees.



rugby league examines the contemporary evidence and the contradictory second-hand oral history. It highlights the problematic nature of oral history, and discuss what the contradiction tells us about the significance of rugby league to the Featherstone community.

The rugby league authorities' response to the Football Association's ban on women's soccer being played on its pitches is also considered, situating it within the context of soccer's alleged financial irregularities and the appetite for women's soccer being played beyond 1921. The chapter challenges the notion that women playing soccer is emblematic of female emancipation, and that rugby league's resistance to women participating on the field was part of the nation's wider efforts to deny women access to male spheres and to return them to their "place" at hearth and home.

On 4<sup>th</sup> August, 1914, Britain declared war on Germany after Belgium's neutrality in the European war was compromised by the advance of German troops through its border between the German city of Aachen and the Belgian city of Verviers. As Londoners gathered at Buckingham Palace that evening to cheer the king and queen in a display of patriotic pride, little did they know what war would mean for them and their country.<sup>3</sup> The heartache felt by the wives, mothers, siblings and children of those seamen that were the first to be mobilised, would be replicated thousand-fold over the coming years, as women said goodbye to their menfolk sent to the front, often for the very last time.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> *Daily Mirror*, 05 August, 1914, p.3.

<sup>4</sup> *Daily Mirror*, 05 August, 1914, p.4.

Women across Europe were active participants in the war effort; their actions inspiring the neologism “home front”, recognising the importance of domestic efforts to support the war.<sup>5</sup> In Britain, as elsewhere, women did what they could to support men on the fighting front and to ensure that their families survived. Women from all classes were part of the endeavour: from middle-class Vera Brittain who, despite being ‘utterly incompetent at all forms of needlework’, knitted garments for the soldiers, to the women of the working-classes, such as those in the Yorkshire pit town of Featherstone, who made socks and shirts for the troops as part of the Featherstone and Purston Shirt and Sock Fund organised by Mrs Darlington.<sup>6</sup>

It has oft been thought that women’s actions during the First World War did much to fundamentally change the lives of women, but as historians such as Penny Summerfield have argued, feminist scholars since the 1970s have found little evidence to support this.<sup>7</sup> One significant, albeit *temporary* occurrence was the availability of

opportunities for working-class women to shift the nature of their employment, for greater employment of married women with children, and for short-lived changes in the kinds of industrial work that women were permitted to perform.<sup>8</sup>

Women undertook many different roles, from delivering mail and running the milk rounds, to secretarial and administration tasks in banking, government and sundry business

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<sup>5</sup> *The Times* 11 April, 1917, p.5.

<sup>6</sup> Vera Brittain, *Testament of Youth: An Autobiographical Study of the Years 1900-1925*, (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1933), p.71; *Pontefract and Castleford Express*, 10 January, 1919, p.6.

<sup>7</sup> Penny Summerfield, ‘Women and War in the Twentieth Century’ in *Women’s History: Britain, 1850-1945, An Introduction*, (ed.) June Purvis, (London: UCL Press Ltd., 1995), pp.307-332.

<sup>8</sup> Susan R. Grayzel, *Women and the First World War*, (Harlow: Pearson Education Ltd., 2002), p.29.

offices. Women also worked in direct support of the war effort, in auxiliary sections of the armed forces or the police. Many working-class women opted for factory work, such as those who entered the many munitions factories, which 'provided employment for more working-class women than other types of war work', lured in no small part by wages that were 'higher than most women had previously received'.<sup>9</sup> For these women especially, work was essential to keep their families going through war time. Separation allowances paid by the government did not adequately cover the loss of the male breadwinner's wages and, in the case of towns and cities that saw mass-migration of workers arriving into the munitions industries, rising rental costs, and could be withdrawn in cases of proven cases of 'being drunk and disorderly or [...] general "unwifely" behaviour'.<sup>10</sup> Yet despite the necessity of women moving into some hitherto men-only professions, it was only ever considered temporary and trade unions lobbied employers to ensure men's access to jobs and their wage levels were not threatened by women working. As a result the emphasis on women putting the home and motherhood before all else remained. First and foremost, women's primary function was that of faithful wife and mother.<sup>11</sup> Margaret Higonnet described the 'paradoxical progress and regress that has characterized women's status and representation' during the First World War:

When the homefront is mobilized, women may be allowed to move "forward" in terms of employment or social policy, yet the battlefield – pre-eminently a male domain – takes economic and cultural priority. Therefore, while women's objective situation does change, relationships of dominance and subordination are retained through discourses that systematically designate unequal gender relations.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Susan R. Grayzel, *Women and the First World War*, p.29.

<sup>10</sup> Penny Summerfield, 'Women and War in the Twentieth Century', p.309.

<sup>11</sup> Susan R. Grayzel, *Women and the First World War*, p.28.

<sup>12</sup> Margaret Randolph Higonnet, Jane Jenson, Sonya Michel & Margaret Collins Weitz (eds.), *Behind the Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), p.6.

Women's columns lamented this 'all-round campaign against women' that took place after the war as a 'time of snatching back' jobs from working women. But according to some, the problem went that bit further. In 1921, one women's column from the north-west complained of

Industry men [who] have not been satisfied with getting back the posts which were specifically held by women only as locum tenens. They have been and are are busy snatching work from them wherever possible, and this continuing opposition to women who must work in order to live is bitterly disappointing.<sup>13</sup>

One other area where women were admitted into the male sphere on a temporary basis was football, both rugby and soccer, which was used as a means to raised funds for the various war charities all over Britain.<sup>14</sup> In Wales, women munitions workers took to the pitch to raise funds for charity in a game played seemingly under rugby union rules, with thousands reportedly attending Cardiff Arms Park on September 29<sup>th</sup>, 1917, where 'a wonderful display of scrimmaging, running, passing, and kicking was given by the girls, who pleased the spectators immensely by their vimful and earnest methods'.<sup>15</sup> Another match was arranged for 15<sup>th</sup> December, between Newport Ladies and Cardiff Ladies, 'for the benefit of the City Battalion Comforts Fund'.<sup>16</sup> According to one report, several of the Cardiff women who played in that match were no strangers to physical, masculine sport, being 'good boxers also'.<sup>17</sup> As Newport were beating Cardiff six points to nil at rugby union, Abergavenny United Ladies achieved a one-all draw against

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<sup>13</sup> Leigh, *Tyldesley and Atherton Journal and District News*, 11 February, 1921, p.2.

<sup>14</sup> Selected examples: Scotland: *Daily Record*, 09 July, 1917, p.6; *Daily Record*, 30 July 1917, p.6; England: *Lancashire Evening Post*, 10 November, 1917, p.5.

<sup>15</sup> *Western Mail*, 02 October, 1917, p.15.

<sup>16</sup> *Western Mail*, 15 December, 1917, p.4.

<sup>17</sup> *Western Mail*, 15 December, 1917, p.3.

the Ladies “Blighty” Team in a charity soccer match, also for war funds.<sup>18</sup> The Cardiff Ladies rugby team turned out once more, visting Treorchy in aid of the *Evening Express* Prisoners of War Fund, in May 1918.<sup>19</sup> On the western coast of the north of England during the latter part of 1917, female munitions workers on the western bank of the River Mersey, in the Seacombe district of Wallasey, also took to the field under association rules, ‘for the benefit of our boys at the front’. By November 2<sup>nd</sup> they had played eight matches unbeaten, ‘all with girls’, and scored twelve goals with one penalty against them. Their left-back was reported to have had a ‘good “punt” – forty yards is not at all bad for a lady’. The ‘terror of the team’ was the centre-half, M. Warner, who played feared ‘nothing nor anybody, and [could] tackle as good as any junior’. The Merseysiders, run from the Plough Inn, Rice Lane, Liverpool, made efforts to procure a football field, ‘enclosed or otherwise’, whilst seeking to carry on their efforts by challenging ‘any team (ladies) in this or Manchester district, or Barrow’.<sup>20</sup> Over on the east coast in Grimsby, a game took place that could have caused controversy for some, when a ‘very fair attendance’ saw a team of male minesweepers take on a team of ‘Denaby lady footballers’ in Grimsby, in aid of the local naval charities. In an attempt to avoid the men ‘succumb[ing] to a temptation to cuddle their opponents’ the men ‘played with their hands secured behind their backs’. Adding to the comedic effect of the game were the ladies themselves, who after one half of good play that saw them leading by three goals to two, they amusingly played the second half ‘for both sides as fancy dictated’ and the

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<sup>18</sup> *Western Mail*, 15 December, 1917, p.6.

<sup>19</sup> *Western Mail*, 23 May, 1918, p.3.

<sup>20</sup> All quotations from *Liverpool Echo*, 02 November, 1917, p.4.

referee declared an arbitrary four-all draw at the final whistle ‘though nobody quite knows how he arrived at it’.<sup>21</sup>

These forays into the football codes were reflective of the wider ‘wartime propaganda’ that ‘exhorted women to brave unfamiliar work’. Whilst women strayed into men’s work, they also ventured into men’s leisure pursuits. Nevertheless, just like the appeals for women to undertake “unfamiliar”, male work, these matches were ‘contained within a nationalist and militarist discourse that reinforced patriarchal, organicist notions of gender relations’.<sup>22</sup> Women playing rugby and soccer was accepted, but only if the motive was *helping*. As we have seen in the previous chapter, even when playing the game, women’s participation was always framed in terms of their support and facilitation of male activities. Whilst women played soccer more extensively than ever before, this did not challenge the entrenched gender order of either society or sport. Women’s football was another way that women sustained the nation at war, supporting the men on the front lines through partaking in matches on a strictly temporary basis for the war’s duration.

“Get on ta t’field. That’s t’place” – rugby and soccer in the 1920s.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> All quotations from *Hull Daily Mail*, 03 December, 1917, p.2.

<sup>22</sup> Both quotations from Margaret Randolph Higonnet, Jane Jenson, Sonya Michel & Margaret Collins Weitz (eds.), *Behind the Lines*, p.7.

<sup>23</sup> Herbert Smith, mining president, during the 1921 Miners’ Strike, quoted in A. J. P. Taylor, *English History 1914-1945*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, [1965] 2001), p.146.

In her 1928 history, *Women's Work in Modern England*, Vera Brittain documented that:

the War had certainly given the world an object lesson in woman's achievement, but men in general showed a disturbing tendency to be appalled rather than encouraged by this demonstration of unexpected ability.<sup>24</sup>

With the Restoration of the Pre-War Practices Act of July 1918 the government introduced legislation that expelled women from the jobs they had done during the war, forcing some into economic hardship. The government and trade unions pushed women back into the home and their former work, expecting women to return to their pre-war state. Many cared for the men who went to fight, looking after injured spouses, fathers and siblings and were thus inhibited in the work they could undertake. These women became the breadwinners of their households, and the decrease in wages hit those families hard. Many reluctantly returned to domestic service, losing the personal freedoms that war work had granted them. In 1919, 195,000 women returned to domestic occupations, and those who refused and remained on state benefits were decried by the media as shirkers, luxuriating at the expense of the state.<sup>25</sup> By 1921, only the rugby league heartlands of Lancashire and West Yorkshire had the majority of women workers in other, non-domestic occupations.<sup>26</sup>

Yet the women of England's industry-heavy northern counties were dealt another blow, when, on the crest of a financial crash, 'the affairs of the coal industry dragged the whole nation into turmoil'.<sup>27</sup> Post-war unrest had dogged the Triple Alliance of the miners, the railway workers and the transport workers, but in October 1920 the miners,

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<sup>24</sup> Vera Brittain, *Women's Work in Modern England*, (London: Noel Douglas, 1928), p.10.

<sup>25</sup> Vera Brittain, *Women's Work*, p.11.

<sup>26</sup> Vera Brittain, *Women's Work*, p.11.

<sup>27</sup> A. J. P. Taylor, *English History 1914-1945*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, [1965] 2001), p.144.

demanding an increased wage, went on strike. However, throughout Europe production exceeded demand and when British prices plummeted, employment levels plummeted also. On March 31<sup>st</sup>, 1921, the government, in an attempt to cut costs, re-privatised the coal industry, and the owners attempted to slash wages and reintroduce disparity by implementing the 'old system of district rates, which gave miners at inferior pits less than those working on richer seams'.<sup>28</sup> Rejecting the miners' calls for a universal rate of pay, the owners began a lockout on April 1<sup>st</sup>.

Just nineteen days prior on 12<sup>th</sup> March, in the West Yorkshire pit town of Featherstone over 9,000 people attended the Post Office Road ground to see the Featherstone Rovers take on Dewsbury in the second round of the Northern Union Cup. The club had been revived in 1919 as the local men returned from the war. Largely made up of local miners, the club was inextricably linked to the Featherstone Main Colliery, having initially made its home on the pit's Miners' Welfare Ground on Halfpenny Lane.<sup>29</sup> The colliery was one of many in the immediate area of Castleford and Pontefract, and as usual when the lockout began on April 1<sup>st</sup> the local community rallied round the affected families and formed area distress funds.

Once again, women got "on ta t'field" and played soccer. On Monday, 23<sup>rd</sup> May a match was played at the Lock Lane rugby ground, between Castleford Town Ladies and Lock Lane Ladies. 'The novelty of the event made a strong appeal to this sporting district' and approximately 8,000 turned up to watch. *The Pontefract and Castleford Express* considered that 'apart from the primary object of the match, to raise funds for the

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<sup>28</sup> A. J. P. Taylor, *English History*. p.145.

<sup>29</sup> *Pontefract and Castleford Express*, 31 January, 1919, p.3.



distress fund, the event provided relaxation for the people'. The women, who had only practised together 'two or three times' had received input from Sheffield United's international goalkeeper Harold Gough. The women 'took their football much more seriously than might have been expected' and as a result 'the form of the players came as a revelation to the crowd'. Whilst 'some of the movements were quite good', the game 'naturally [provided] much to amuse the crowd'.<sup>30</sup>

In the same edition of the *Pontefract and Castleford Express* of 27<sup>th</sup> May, appeared a short article about a group of women in Featherstone, who 'anxious to do their bit for the local Distress Fund' had also organised themselves into football teams, named South Featherstone and North Featherstone.<sup>31</sup> Their first game was played five days before the game at Castleford, on 18<sup>th</sup> May, and the resultant collection amounted to £13 17s.<sup>32</sup> Oral history evidence collected by Ian Clayton suggests that the Featherstone women played rugby league. One of those players, Alice Brear, was born on 31<sup>st</sup> July, 1901, and described how the women of the town

first tried to start a rugby team just after the Great War, when there was a pit strike on. We organised a game up at the Rovers' field but it ended with the men complaining so we had to play soccer instead. Then in 1921, when there was another strike, we decided it was rugby or nothing, ignored what the men had to say about it and went ahead.<sup>33</sup>

However, evidence from the newspaper refutes Alice's claims, stating categorically that in 1921 the women

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<sup>30</sup> All quotations from *Pontefract and Castleford Express*, 27 May, 1921, p.8.

<sup>31</sup> *Pontefract and Castleford Express*, 27 May, 1921, p.7.

<sup>32</sup> *Pontefract and Castleford Express*, 27 May, 1921, p.7.

<sup>33</sup> Ian Clayton, 'Women's Rugby' in *Running for Clocks and Dessert Spoons*, (Castleford: Yorkshire Art Circus, 1988), p.34.

would dearly have liked to play the Northern Union game, about which they know most; but this was scotched by their men-folk, on the ground that it was too dangerous. So they played Association.<sup>34</sup>

Many references to local soccer matches appear in the newspapers of the time, with Pontefract Ladies entertaining Featherstone on May 26<sup>th</sup>, raising £17 for the Pontefract Distress Fund.<sup>35</sup> A return match at Featherstone for its Distress Fund saw the home side unable to 'live with the fleet-footed lasses from Pomfret [Pontefract], who raced about the field like young horses'.<sup>36</sup> The Featherstone 'heroine' was declared to be their goalkeeper, another indication that soccer was the code of football played. Other games that were reported on were between Pontefract and Castleford on June 9<sup>th</sup> and the week of June 20<sup>th</sup>, and Featherstone versus South Kirkby on June 30<sup>th</sup>.<sup>37</sup> The Pontefract team were often praised for being the better side and sought 'to play any ladies' team in the district for charity'.<sup>38</sup> However, after the strike was ended on June 28<sup>th</sup> and the miners returned to work on July 4<sup>th</sup>, these local town distress funds were closed and the teams ceased to play.<sup>39</sup>

Nevertheless, Alice distinctly remembered playing rugby 'at prop forward and a woman from Pontefract was the goal kicker. She could kick as well as any man and she'd only one eye', suggesting that even disability did not hold the women back.<sup>40</sup> She went on to describe how the team would play in the Featherstone Rovers kit and boots, using the Junction Hotel as their changing room. She also spoke of the male spectators 'making fun

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<sup>34</sup> *Pontefract and Castleford Express*, 27 May, 1921, p.7.

<sup>35</sup> *The Pontefract Advertiser*, 28 May, 1921, p.2.

<sup>36</sup> *The Pontefract Advertiser*, 04 June, 1921, p.2.

<sup>37</sup> *The Pontefract Advertiser*, 11 June, 1921, p.2; *The Pontefract Advertiser*, 25 June, 1921, p.2; *The Pontefract and Castleford Express*, 08 July, 1921, p.6.

<sup>38</sup> *The Pontefract Advertiser*, 25 June, 1921, p.2.

<sup>39</sup> *The Spectator*, 01 July, 1921, pp.12-13; *The Pontefract and Castleford Express*, 08 July, 1921, p.6; *The Pontefract and Castleford Express*, 15 July, 1921, p.7.

<sup>40</sup> Ian Clayton, 'Women's Rugby' in *Running for Clocks and Dessert Spoons*, (Castleford: Yorkshire Art Circus, 1988), p.34.

of us a bit and we didn't like bending down in front of them to scrum off – but they couldn't do anything to stop us'.<sup>41</sup> This comment belies an awareness of the physical nature of women's bodies and the self-consciousness that playing rugby induced. It also implies some sentience of the sexually provocative nature of women bending over in front of men whilst wearing shorts. Her memory was that "Billy Balten" was the team's trainer and they were known as "Billy Balten's Thirteen". Billy Balten was actually the Great Britain and England rugby league three-quarter Billy Batten, who was born in nearby Kinsley, a mining village four miles away. Batten was still very much part of the local community; in 1920, he received a princely sum of £1,079 from Hull supporters in his testimonial, and during the miners' strike he donated a £350 to the distressed 'women and children' of Kinsley.<sup>42</sup> Newspaper searches in the area show that Batten's team did exist, but again the evidence shows that they played soccer. On June 18<sup>th</sup>, "'Billy" Batten's team, from Kinsley' played Crigglestone at Wakefield and won the match six goals to nil.<sup>43</sup> Billed as a 'starring engagement attraction *for ladies*', Kinsley, 'Batten's undefeated team' played Yorkshire Ladies at Hull FC's Boulevard ground on the August bank holiday as part of a 'monster sports meeting' that included footracing and wrestling.<sup>44</sup> An advertisement for the game in the *Hull Daily Mail* of July 29<sup>th</sup> indicated that Kinsley had won over fifteen matches, scored seventy-five goals with only five scored against them.<sup>45</sup> That they played soccer cannot be in doubt, because the match report published on the evening of the

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<sup>41</sup> Ian Clayton, 'Women's Rugby', p.34.

<sup>42</sup> *Yorkshire Evening Post*, 09 February, 1928, p.9; Tony Collins, *Rugby's Great Split*, p.199; Tony Collins, *Rugby League in Twentieth Century Britain*, p.46.

<sup>43</sup> *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, 20 June, 1921, p.12.

<sup>44</sup> *Hull Daily Mail*, 14 July, 1921, p.4 (my emphasis); *Hull Daily Mail*, 29 July, 1921, p.4.

<sup>45</sup> *Hull Daily Mail*, 29 July, 1921, p.4.

match opined that the form of Batten's team was such that they had 'the right to play Dick Kerr's Team for honours is drawing very near'.<sup>46</sup>

Dick, Kerr and Company was a manufacturer of trams and locomotives, with a factory in Preston, Lancashire. The factory had been converted to manufacture munitions for the duration of the war and the firm had made efforts to raise funds for the local military hospitals. In January of 1917, staff from Dick, Kerr and Company gave a concert to entertain patients at Fulwood Military Hospital, and when the ladies' soccer team was formed later in the November it sought to raise money for the Moor Park Hospital, a Voluntary Aid Detachment hospital that opened in December 1914 and was located approximately one mile from the factory.<sup>47</sup> Dick, Kerr's were slow to organise a ladies' side in comparison to other towns in the north: 'in Manchester, Sheffield, Liverpool, and other centres the feminine workers have played many games and raised considerable sums of money on behalf of the war charities'.<sup>48</sup> However, the formidable side that they would become was far from apparent at their first match, when they took on a side from Thomas Coulthard and Company, a Preston spindle-makers in front of a crowd of ten thousand at Preston North End's ground on Christmas day.<sup>49</sup> There was scepticism prior to the match, with the *Lancashire Evening Post* suggesting that despite 'one or two old hands at the game [...] endeavouring to instil into them an idea of organised, as opposed to what may be described as mob, effort', the paying public could expect this 'to be forgotten on the

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<sup>46</sup> *Hull Daily Mail*, 01 August, 1921, p.4.

<sup>47</sup> *Preston Herald*, 27 January, 1917, p.8; *Preston Herald*, 24 December, 1914, p.6.

<sup>48</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, 10 November, 1917, p.5.

<sup>49</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, 26 December, 1917, p.4.

day' and instead be served 'a joyous scramble'.<sup>50</sup> On the day 'there was a tendency amongst the players at the start to giggle' observed the *Post*, and the slow pace 'had the same effect as a slow-moving kinema picture'.<sup>51</sup> In spite of this, their reasons for playing were not forgotten and they were 'commended for the effort in the sacred cause of war charity'.<sup>52</sup> From these beginnings, Dick, Kerr's became an incredibly popular side, traversing the country and during the post-war period they continued to play for charity and visited France in 1921, and in 1922 travelled to Belgium, Holland and America, in the latter country playing teams of men.<sup>53</sup>

If Alice did play for Billy Batten's side in 1921, evidence suggests that she would definitely have been playing soccer and refutes her claims of playing rugby. Could she have been remembering 1919 instead? Sources for local evidence are scarce from 1919 as the editor of the *Pontefract Advertiser* was still enlisted, so the paper was not being published. Nor is there any mention of women's teams playing rugby or soccer in the other local newspaper, *The Pontefract and Castleford Express*. Alice also states that the women 'did it all again during the 1926 strike', thereby recalling a total of three instances of playing rugby during strikes.<sup>54</sup> Efforts proved fruitless in attempting to verify this claim; there is no mention of women playing any football code during the General Strike or the miners' lockout of 1926. Moreover, the idea of women playing rugby, and especially rugby

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<sup>50</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, 22 December, 1917, p.5.

<sup>51</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, 26 December, 1917, p.4.

<sup>52</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, 22 December, 1917, p.5.

<sup>53</sup> Alethea Melling, 'Woman and Football' in *Encyclopedia of British Football* (eds.) Richard Cox, Dave Russell & Wray Vamplew, (London: Routledge, 2002), pp.326-327. For more on Dick, Kerr's women's team, see Williams and Newsome.

<sup>54</sup> Ian Clayton, 'Women's Rugby', p.35.

league, would have been so unique and controversial at this time that it is inconceivable that it would have gone unnoticed by the local press.

So what is one to make of Alice's testimony? The reliability of Alice's memory as recounted in the oral history interview must be questioned, firstly, because memory itself and the act of recall is rarely faithful to events. Secondly, allowances must be made for the passage of time; Alice was telling the story to Ian Clayton in 1987, some 67 years since the events of 1921 supposedly occurred, at the approximate age of 87. Finally, there is no recording of the interview and the written transcript was made from notes taken by Clayton which have since been destroyed, therefore Alice's story has been filtered through and edited by an intermediary.<sup>55</sup> On the first point, a memory is not a complete, immutable block of information stored in a human brain and it is unreasonable to expect anyone to recall an event faithfully. As Geoffrey Cubitt explains,

the past does not, as a complete and immediate experiential reality, survive in the present, and few people nowadays would suggest that what memory gives us is somehow an immutable image of things past, quasi-photographic in its accuracy'.<sup>56</sup>

This is largely because of the way that memories must be reconstructed:

not in the sense of reassembling something that has been taken to pieces and carefully stored, but in the sense of imaginatively configuring something that can no longer have the character of actuality'.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Ian Clayton, *Recorded Interview*. 23 September, 2013, Featherstone.

<sup>56</sup> Geoffrey Cubitt, *History and Memory*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), p.77. See also Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988); Paul Thompson, *The Oral History Reader*, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006 [1998]).

<sup>57</sup> Geoffrey Cubitt, *History and Memory*, p.77.

The passage of time is a factor that affects how this cerebral construction takes place, and given that Alice was recalling events over sixty years later, must be taken into consideration.

to remember something is to rework it mentally, within the present's habitual structures of thought and assumption. What is remembered is always reconfigured, and thus implicitly interpreted, never merely resuscitated or reproduced.<sup>58</sup>

Alice had spent her entire life in Featherstone, where rugby league was the focal point of the community and no doubt its cultural transferences were unconsciously and indelibly imbibed by its residents, to be expressed subliminally in multifarious ways. In 1983, Featherstone won the Challenge Cup in an unexpected victory at Wembley against Hull FC just a few months before the outbreak of the year-long miners' strike of 1984-85. Sally Chandler, in her essay 'Oral History Across Generations' noted that 'both cultural myths and autobiographical memory provide bases for constructing coherent stories for who we are, both as individuals and within a community'.<sup>59</sup> These events were significant in Featherstone and very recent when Alice recounted her story; perhaps her memories of 1921 were coloured by them, becoming altered by "the present's habitual structures of thought and assumption" producing a different interpretation. Her story of how the women played rugby taps into the community's passion for and ownership of the game and the expectation that women come together during strikes to support their menfolk, as recently displayed.

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<sup>58</sup> Geoffrey Cubitt, *History and Memory*, p.79.

<sup>59</sup> Sally Chandler 'Oral History Across Generations: Age, Generational Identity and Oral Testimony' in *Oral History*, Vol. 33, Nº 2 (2005), p.49.

Age can also be considered, especially as Alice passed away the following year. For the third-party researcher, there is no way of judging whether Alice was in rude health or what her mental capabilities were in the winter of her life. Chandler describes how

social, cognitive and psychological processes change over the life course; that the forms and functions of these processes are often characteristic of a particular life stage; and that membership in a particular generational cohort influences the cultural stories available to individuals for the construction and interpretation of identity.

Alice's consideration of the 'drawbacks' of playing rugby are interesting in this context. She remarked

I used to have to leave the young 'uns with a woman down the street and she fed them up till I came back – but you can't carry on like that.<sup>60</sup>

It is the latter part of the comment which begs the following question: just how much of that opinion has been formed by changes in the notion of motherhood and what it means to be a "good" mother? Was the statement a defence against modern judgements of womanhood? Have any experiences in her life since 1921 influenced her in this regard?

Here, as in the interview as a whole, the impact of the interviewer must also be deliberated. Clayton himself was linked with the Featherstone club and had heard from someone else about the women who "played rugby". He visited Alice with a definite idea that this was the game they played, and he proceeded with the interview on that subjective basis, which rules out the possibility of seeking to ascertain any definition what "football" and "rugby" meant to Alice back in 1921. In 1987 the two codes were explicitly demarcated in a way that, as we have seen, was not apparent sixty years previously. Here, the intergenerational cultural differences between the subject and the interviewer are

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<sup>60</sup> Ian Clayton, 'Women's Rugby', p.35.



apparent. Without the existence of the notes he made at the time, it is impossible to say too what extent Clayton's subjectivity affected his interview style, Alice's retelling of her memories, his notetaking, or his final interpretation in the written account. With close connections to the town and its history, Clayton's own subjectivity comes into play, as exemplified when, during an interview with the author in 2013, he remarked: "'rugby was all they'd ever known and ever seen, why would they have played anything else?'"<sup>61</sup> Clayton himself had never known a soccer culture in the town or the immediate area, but when it came to ladies playing in 1921 there is evidence that one existed. In speaking to the author, Clayton's own desire to defend his work and his methodology would perhaps have been a factor in this remark.

Alice's version of events cannot be shaped into a sanctioned version of the truth, but nevertheless can help us consider the limitations women faced in attempting to play the sport. It is likely that the reality lies somewhere between Alice's account and that of the newspaper reports. Perhaps Alice did play in some games of unorganised, informal rugby, or, in games that combined some form of handling with the kicking game.

### Degenerate football?

In that other rugby league heartland over on the other side of the Pennines, the women of the north-west in Wigan and Leigh also donned their soccer boots in support of the miners' lock-out. Alethea Melling considers that it was 'relatively easy for women to

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<sup>61</sup> Ian Clayton, *Recorded Interview*. 23 September, 2013, Featherstone.

use [soccer] as a vehicle for community cohesion' at the time, because 'football was already an important aspect of local culture', citing the Leigh Sunday School League and Wigan Combination association leagues.<sup>62</sup> However, once again, the sport that dominated the area was rugby league. Both towns had successful professional sides in the Northern Union. That very year, Leigh beat Halifax to win the Challenge Cup Final in their first ever appearance on April 30<sup>th</sup>, 1921 and were the first Lancashire side to lift the trophy since 1911. That same season they achieved a record home attendance when 21,000 spectators saw them play Rochdale in the Lancashire Cup. Wigan were the highest placed Lancashire team in the Northern Union Championship, finishing fourth. They were a team accelerating towards glory, for they would go on to win the Challenge Cup themselves in the 1923-24 season.

The first women's soccer match that took place in Leigh was between Chorley Ladies and Fleetwood Ladies on February 19<sup>th</sup>, 1921, three months before the start of the "pea soup" soccer matches by the miners' wives. The match raised money for the National Federation of Discharged Sailors and Soldiers, showing to what extent the effects of war lingered in the minds of the populace.<sup>63</sup> Eight hundred watched Chorley beat Fleetwood by two goals to one.<sup>64</sup> On March 12<sup>th</sup>, a letter appeared in the *Wigan Examiner* deriding soccer, and is worth repeating here in full:

The Association footballer does seem to be a molly-coddle of the first water. Go and watch two N.U. teams play, and compare the

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<sup>62</sup> Alethea Melling, "'Plucky Lasses', 'Pea Soup' and Politics: The Role of Ladies' Football during the 1921 Miners' Lock-Out in Wigan and Leigh" in *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, Vol. 16, No 1 (1999), p.38-39.

<sup>63</sup> *Leigh, Tyldesley and Atherton Journal and District News*, 22 February, 1921, p.3.

<sup>64</sup> *Leigh, Tyldesley and Atherton Journal and District News*, 22 February, 1921, p.3.

grit displayed there with and Association match! I can't understand great crowds attending Association matches. I can only come to one conclusion, that the spectators have degenerated as well as the players. The N.U. people can smile when they read about the lady footballers; they can never play Rugby. Does this prove which is the man's game?<sup>65</sup>

The letter also appeared in the *Leigh, Tyldesley and Atherton Journal and District News* three days later, and sparked several replies agreeing with the writer.<sup>66</sup> The writer's choice of language here is interesting, the verb "degenerated" means to have 'fallen from ancestral or original excellence' and has connotations not only of Satan's fall from Heaven, but also with the original sin of Eve.<sup>67</sup> Rugby here, is the purest form of football, with soccer the lower, impure code, with its masculine DNA tainted further by the women players. What the writer would have made of the thirty-or-so Wigan men who fainted at the sound of a soccer player's leg being broken at Park Lane on March 19<sup>th</sup>, one can only surmise.<sup>68</sup>

In April, Dick, Kerr's appeared in Standish, some three-and-a-half miles north of Wigan, whilst Chorley and Fleetwood met at the home of Wigan Borough F.C., Springfield Park, both in aid of war-related charities.<sup>69</sup> By May, families were suffering hardship, and the local 'Women's Outlook' column reflected that 'strikes are women's affairs' because

It is the womenfolk who have to manoeuvre and scheme, pawn  
and sell, and deny themselves that their men and children shall

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<sup>65</sup> *Wigan Examiner*, 12 March, 1921, p.8.

<sup>66</sup> *Leigh, Tyldesley and Atherton Journal and District News*, 15 March, 1921, p.3; *Wigan Examiner*, 22 March, 1921, p.4.

<sup>67</sup> 'degenerate, v.' in *Oxford English Dictionary Online*. Available: <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/49056> [Accessed 31 October, 2014].

<sup>68</sup> *Wigan Observer and District Advertiser*, 26 March, 1921, p.3.

<sup>69</sup> *Wigan Observer and District Advertiser*, 14 April, 1921, p.2; *Wigan Observer and District Advertiser*, 26 April, 1921, p.3.

suffer as little as possible, as many local and staunch wife and mother is doing now.<sup>70</sup>

Women were making personal sacrifices, but were also “staunch” in their support for the strikers. Coal pickers included men, women and children digging for surface coal at the edge of the mines, some women would ‘bring meals and take back coal for the household’.<sup>71</sup> Whilst locked-out miners in Leigh’s Daubhill district attempted to stop coal being transported from the district boarded a lorry and sent coal tumbling onto the tram lines, men women and children clamoured for the ‘black diamonds’, using ‘bags, caps, hats and baskets’ as receptacles, ‘whilst many of the womenfolk preferred to use their clean aprons rather than miss the opportunity of getting a bit of fuel on the cheap’.<sup>72</sup> Local support came from many quarters, with men also playing in soccer matches for the various local miners’ children’s funds, before the women of Wigan’s Platt Bridge played Abram and a collection raised £16 14s 1½d for the same.<sup>73</sup> In nearby St. Helens, Lily Parr of Dick, Kerr’s fame played for St. Helens Ladies against Preston Ladies in a fundraiser for the St Helens Ladies Benevolent Society.<sup>74</sup> Many “married versus single” women’s matches also took place for organisations such as the Conservative and Labour Club Food Committee.<sup>75</sup>

In rugby league areas, women took to playing soccer for charity probably because as Melling states, ‘the amount of money ladies’ football raised for charity was

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<sup>70</sup> Leigh, Tyldesley and Atherton Journal and District News, 06 May, 1921, p.2.

<sup>71</sup> Leigh, Tyldesley and Atherton Journal and District News, 13 May, 1921, p.6.

<sup>72</sup> Leigh, Tyldesley and Atherton Journal and District News, 06 May, 1921, p.5.

<sup>73</sup> For examples of men’s game see: Wigan Examiner, 10 May, 1921, p.3; Wigan Observer and District Advertiser, 21 May, 1921, p.6. Information on women’s game from: Wigan Examiner, 17 May, 1921, p.3; Alethea Melling, “Plucky Lassies”, p.49.

<sup>74</sup> Leigh, Tyldesley and Atherton Journal and District News, 13 May, 1921, p.8.

<sup>75</sup> Wigan Observer and District Advertiser, 19 May, 1921, p.2; Leigh, Tyldesley and Atherton Journal and District News, 20 May, 1921, p.7; Wigan Examiner, 21 May, 1921, p.12.

legendary'.<sup>76</sup> The novelty of it overlapped from the previous century, combining elements of 1890s music hall with sporting endeavour that entertained the masses during times of strife, such as the war and the miners' strikes. Above all else, it was a proven way of raising funds, and for the communities of the Featherstone and Wigan and Leigh areas, money to help the affected families during the miners' strike was vital. Melling has suggested that Stephen Jones' comment "'Leisure was and is, firmly situated in the political domain'" is absolutely accurate in the context'.<sup>77</sup> Whilst those matches raising funds for war charities are political in a broad sense, the urgent necessity of supplying food and provision for their suffering communities render these matches *personal*. Women knew that strikes affected women most, and by raising money in the most effective way possible they could help out their own families, friends and neighbours.

When the English Ladies' Football Association was born in December that year, it too was concerned with the organisation of 'charity matches', and can be viewed as part of the continuum that had seen women's football 'firmly situated in the charity sphere'.<sup>78</sup> Dick, Kerr's Ladies declined an invitation to join believing that they could 'better help deserving objects by having a free hand to arrange matches as they like[d]'.<sup>79</sup> The formulation of the English Ladies' Football Association was a response to the banning of women's football from all grounds belonging to Association clubs.<sup>80</sup> Approaches made by women with intentions of gaining some form of officialdom had

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<sup>76</sup> Alethea Melling, "'Plucky Lasses'", p.47.

<sup>77</sup> Alethea Melling, "'Plucky Lasses'", p.44.

<sup>78</sup> *Hull Daily Mail*, 14 December, 1921, p.2; Alethea Melling, "'Plucky Lasses'", p.51.

<sup>79</sup> *Nottingham Evening Post*, 11 March, 1921, p.2.

<sup>80</sup> *The Times*, 06 December, 1921, p.10.

been rejected before, with the County Referees' Society banning women from applying to become referees in 1919.<sup>81</sup> The F.A.'s assertion that 'football is quite unsuitable for females and ought not to be encouraged' echoed all the biological reasoning that had been proffered before, and newspapers sought opinion from both male and female doctors that backed up that claim.<sup>82</sup> Interestingly, the Football Association also cited complaints made to them over financial irregularities and the 'appropriation of the receipts [that were] absorbed in expenses and inadequate percentage devoted to charitable objects'.<sup>83</sup> One example of financial irregularity in women's charitable soccer was brought before the Camborne, Redruth and District Unemployment Relief Committee in October 1921. The match had been arranged 'for the benefit of the unemployed' and the gate money was reported to be over £25 after deduction of tax and the teams' expenses'.<sup>84</sup> However, the Plymouth team were 'reluctant' to hand over the proceeds and instead offered to 'make a donation to the committee's funds as an act of grace'.<sup>85</sup> The team claimed that

it was only after reading the harrowing distress in the area that they decided at the last moment to allocate a portion of the proceeds to the Relief Committee's funds [and they would] not allow any dictation from any persons as to what the amount of their donation must be.<sup>86</sup>

The handbills that promoted the game 'clearly read that "the proceeds were to be devoted to local unemployment funds"', however, once the Plymouth Ladies' Club had sent £15 to the fund they would no longer engage in any contact with the committee.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> *Hull Daily Mail*, 13 November, 1919, p.2.

<sup>82</sup> *The Lancashire Daily Post*, 06 December, 1921, p.5.

<sup>83</sup> *The Times*, 06 December, 1921, p.10.

<sup>84</sup> *Cornishman*, 12 October, 1921, p.2.

<sup>85</sup> *Western Morning News*, 15 October, 1921, p.3.

<sup>86</sup> *Western Morning News*, 15 October, 1921, p.3.

<sup>87</sup> *Cornubian and Redruth Times*, 03 November, 1921, p.2.

For the Football Association, such occurrences gave a convenient, public reason as to why it and its members should bar the use of its pitches to the women's game, but it must also be contextualised as part of wider discourse about women's place in post-war society, feminine roles, and the efforts made to return women to the domestic sphere. British post-war government policies sought the widespread reassertion of masculine gender roles, and soccer was no exception. Women's soccer was inferior and sullied the male game, and with the ban it sought to reassert itself as a masculine sport. Women's football had been fit for 'special occasions' and whilst it was considered 'interesting as a novelty, or as an effort on behalf of charity', the inferiority of play was believed to be the reason why 'few people would go a second time for the sake of the game'.<sup>88</sup>

In the aftermath of the ban it was suggested that the women's teams would look to rugby grounds in order to continue. One commentator in the *Hull Daily Mail* snidely remarked

Undoubtedly this would be one way out, if the women are not sensible enough to realise what the F.A. have in effect told them, viz., that the time has arrived when these exhibitions have ceased to be a novelty and have become a menace to the great national game.<sup>89</sup>

The writer recalled one 'prominent member' of the Northern Union Council remarking that he had never watched a soccer match:

"I have no use," said he, "for a game that women can play. Ours is a man's game that women have not yet attempted". Strictly

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<sup>88</sup> *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, 22 December, 1921, p.12.

<sup>89</sup> *Hull Daily Mail*, 09 December, 1921, p.2.

speaking, he was not correct. I have seen a Rugby exhibition by women and it was one of the most pitiable imaginable.<sup>90</sup>

The issue had the potential to upset the political relations between the two codes. The

*Hull Daily Mail* writer hoped that the Northern Union would support the Football

Association on the grounds that the relationship between them was

most cordial, and we know how handsomely Association clubs have behaved with regard to N.U. games on their grounds. If the N.U. don't support the F.A. in this matter, future relations might be at least a little strained.<sup>91</sup>

When an application was made to the Council for permission to stage a women's association match in Hull the following February, the Northern Union asserted its opinion unequivocally. The Northern Union rejected the application with the members' discussion showing that 'they were in absolute agreement with the Football Association [cementing] the principle that that women's football would not be permitted on grounds within their jurisdiction'.<sup>92</sup> The decision would also quell any fears that the Union had over the possibility of women playing rugby league at a time when news that women in Sydney had been making their own attempts to play rugby league and were attracting large crowds.<sup>93</sup> The irony of the matter was that it would be the very supporters of the Northern Union game that would be disadvantaged by this particular decision, as it was intended to raise funds for the distress fund connected to the workers of Earle's Shipbuilding Works, a company famous for its number of rugby league supporters.<sup>94</sup> The Yorkshire Rugby Union followed suit, banning soccer from its grounds, condemning

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<sup>90</sup> *Hull Daily Mail*, 09 December, 1921, p.2.

<sup>91</sup> *Hull Daily Mail*, 09 December, 1921, p.2.

<sup>92</sup> *Yorkshire Evening Post*, 08 February, 1922, p.7.

<sup>93</sup> Charles Little, "'What a Freak Show they Made!': Women's Rugby League in 1920s Sydney', *Football Studies*, Vol. 4, No 2 (2001), pp.25-40.

<sup>94</sup> *Yorkshire Evening Post*, 08 February, 1922, p.7; Tony Collins, *Rugby's Great Split: Class, Culture and the Origins of Rugby League Football*, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006), p.157.



women's matches in much harsher terms. James Miller, of the Headingley rugby union club, opined

"we must not encourage them [...] because football for women is not good for them or the game. These women footballers may be all right to look at, but they cannot play football. They are not football matches, but simply women shows".<sup>95</sup>

The Reverend Huggard, of Barnsley, and former president of the Yorkshire Rugby Union, took a somewhat paternalistic and patronising view, stating that men had a duty of care, for

it was quite out of place for women to make an exhibition of themselves on football grounds. They respected, and he hoped, loved their women, and therefore ought not to encourage them to do anything derogatory to their position, or anything that would be unseemly.<sup>96</sup>

Melling argues that 'although it may have been considered immoral by some, ladies' football still managed to attract huge crowds of supporters'.<sup>97</sup> Given the nature of these games, it is reasonable to contest the application of the noun "supporters" in this context. The word in its original form is defined as 'a person or group that sides with, backs up, assists, or approves of a person, cause, etc., esp. in a public arena'<sup>98</sup> and it can be argued that the people turning up to the ladies' soccer matches were there more in support of the causes for which the matches took place, and were instead *spectators*, 'people who see, or look on at, some scene or occurrence; beholders, onlookers,

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<sup>95</sup> *Hull Daily Mail*, 14 March, 1921, p.2.

<sup>96</sup> *Hull Daily Mail*, 14 March, 1921, p.2.

<sup>97</sup> Alethea Melling, "'Plucky Lasses'", p.54.

<sup>98</sup> 'supporter – 1a (1426)' in *Oxford English Dictionary Online*. Available: <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/194682> [Accessed 31 October, 2004].

observers' with a view to being entertained.<sup>99</sup> The sporting context of "supporter" that entered the language in the Victorian period with the commercialisation of sport, 'a person with an enthusiasm for and active interest in a particular form of sport or a particular team or club', may have been reasonably ascribed to some in the crowd, but the short-termism of women's soccer suggests that not many had "enthusiasm or active interest" in women's soccer as a sport or that people did not harbour such attachment to individual women's teams.<sup>100</sup> Dave Russell has stated that 'supporting a football team involved the construction and expression of identities and beliefs which had resonance well beyond the sporting arena'.<sup>101</sup> Melling opines that this is 'poignantly accurate when applied to the political tensions which characterize the communities' of Wigan and Leigh during the lockout.<sup>102</sup> However, this thesis posits that support was not for women's soccer in the true sense of the word, but for the community directly; the women's matches were set up for the particular cause of the miners' distress funds and it is an anachronism to think that those attending or taking part were political. Nor was women's soccer about community identity, for had it been strongly rooted in its communities then the Football Association's curbing of women's matches via the ban would have been fiercely contested. The community identities, throughout the war and during the strikes, were embodied in the *causes* that the women's soccer matches played for, not the means by which the funds were raised. As we shall see in the next chapter, in rugby league areas support in its truest sense was directed via supporters' clubs and attendance at men's club matches.

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<sup>99</sup> 'spectator' in *Oxford English Dictionary Online*. Available: <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/186071> [Accessed 31 October, 2004].

<sup>100</sup> 'supporter – 5b (1843)' in *Oxford English Dictionary Online*. Available: <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/194682> [Accessed 31 October, 2004].

<sup>101</sup> Dave Russell, *Football and the English, 1863-1995*, (Preston: Carnegie, 1997), p.63.

<sup>102</sup> Alethea Melling, "'Plucky Lasses'", p.55.

## 1926: no football during lock-out

During the six-month lockout of 1926, the sporting fundraisers that took place were enacted by men. Women, now more distant from the wartime phenomenon of operating within masculine fields, had largely succumbed to the pushing back of women into more traditional roles by society and the state, accepting what Judy Giles terms ‘the discourse of housewifery’.<sup>103</sup> Women instead looked to soup kitchens and goods ‘bought on credit from the Co-operative Wholesale Society’.<sup>104</sup> Masculinity reigned over the sporting landscape once more, a point emphasised by the abandonment of a proposed prize fight between two women in Hackney due to public outrage. The relief was palpable: ‘the race has not yet reached that lowered level when people would stand by and see two women enter the professional prize ring’, and women’s soccer, thanks to the ‘condemnatory note’ of ‘public opinion’ that considered it ‘border-line of what might be permitted, even under modern conditions’ had ‘simply faded away’.<sup>105</sup> In Featherstone, the largest fundraiser took the form of a carnival, which had the dual purpose of raising money whilst injecting some much-needed fun into the hearts of the downtrodden mining community, especially those children in affected families.<sup>106</sup>

Yet whilst women had reassumed more traditional gender roles, they were making strides politically. As shall be discussed in more detail in chapter four, women were partaking in the decision-making process by gaining entry to local councils. Most

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<sup>103</sup> Judy Giles, *Women, Identity and Private Life*, p.23.

<sup>104</sup> Valerie Hall, *Women at Work, 1860-1939: How Different Industries Shaped Women’s Experiences*, (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2003), p.51.

<sup>105</sup> *Hull Daily Mail*, 30 January, 1926, p.2.

<sup>106</sup> *The Pontefract and Castleford Express*, 02 July, 1926, p.1.

women became active in undertaking practical help for families, but some chose 'riotous behaviour [...] thus temporarily taking on a political role'.<sup>107</sup> These women showed their abhorrence for the strike-breakers and did what they could to deter men from returning to the collieries. In Mansfield, hundreds of miners' wives 'walked five miles in procession to Blidworth Colliery' in an attempt to 'persuade the Blidworth women to get their men to stop working'.<sup>108</sup> The atmosphere during the 1926 lockout was one of 'brutal class confrontation' that resulted in 'the feeling of separation from mainstream society'.<sup>109</sup> Men and women came together to fight against wage cuts that would hit families hard, with women largely operating in the domestic, supporting roles. As Sue Bruley has discussed, the power of class solidarity during the 1926 lockout meant that whilst women were defending their men they ultimately 'bolstered patriarchal practices which undermined women and maintained the notorious inequality of coalfield society'.<sup>110</sup> The exclusion of women from soccer and rugby, even for charity at this time of social distress, shows just how far women had become re-entrenched in their traditional roles.

## Conclusion

This chapter has shown how women's soccer, rather than being framed in a sporting way, was placed firmly in the context of charitable support for male activities. Women playing soccer presented no fundamental challenge to the gender order. This explains why women did not play rugby league, because doing so would have been

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<sup>107</sup> Valerie Hall, *Women at Work*, p.67.

<sup>108</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, 08 June, 1926, p.4.

<sup>109</sup> Sue Bruley, *The Women and Men of 1926: A Gender and Social History of the General Strike and Miners' Lockout in South Wales*, (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2010), p.143.

<sup>110</sup> Sue Bruley, *The Women and Men of 1926*, p.145.

perceived by men *and* women as a challenge to its masculine culture and societal norms of femininity. The phenomenon of the war was that women were temporarily allowed to do male things, especially in employment and, in the case of soccer, even leisure activities. However, like war work, this access was temporary and not sustained afterwards. Their entry to the worlds of work and masculine sport was not on equal terms with men; the two operated on a principal of female difference, with war work largely offering decreased wages and sport insisting on charitable aims. The F.A. ban can be seen as soccer's equivalent of the Restoration of the Pre-War Practices Act of July 1918, and rugby league and union's consolidation of it only reinforced the exclusion of women from the possibility of playing their sports *en masse*.

The approach taken in this chapter differs from what has been the dominant narrative as suggested in the work of Jean Williams and other authors, who have seen the rise of women's soccer in this period as an expression of female emancipation. Whilst more women had opportunities to play soccer than previously, this took place within rigidly circumscribed, gendered boundaries that did not threaten, nor even seek to question, women's role in either society or sport. That women's soccer had "faded away" by 1926 demonstrates the extent to which it was tied to era of wartime fundraising, a traditional female activity, alongside charity work and support for men as a whole. Whilst women played soccer across the country, rugby league, which saw itself as the epitome of northern masculinity, excluded women from playing the sport, even for charitable purposes, thus demonstrating that the events of the First World War 'failed to free the

majority of women from being held responsible for their households and their children'.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Susan R. Grayzel, *Women and the First World War*, p.118.

## Chapter Four: “Why should men have all the football pleasures?”: Women off the Field in Rugby League during the 1920s and 1930s

During the First World War and its aftermath, the sports field was not the only arena on which women operated to raise funds for war causes and striking families. This chapter focuses on what women did in rugby league off the pitch, firstly for charitable causes and then, as the 1920s progressed, to raise funds and patronage for their local rugby league clubs. As we shall see, how women operated within the sport at first mirrored the expectations society had of women, but as the decade wore on, women started to find ways to participate in the activities of their local clubs in ways that men often found difficult to object to.

Therefore, this chapter will consider how women’s charity work called upon rugby league to aid its cause, and how rugby league similarly called upon women for its own charitable aims after World War One. The aftermath of the war and how the slow resumption of rugby affected the financial health of players’ families will be considered. We shall see how rugby league found itself competing with cinema for women’s attention and leisure time and how by enticing them on match days with ticket offers, it hoped to harness the positive influence of women in quelling crowd disturbances to create a welcoming environment that would help to increase gate receipts. Evidence of women taking an interest and reading sports columns in newspapers shall be presented. The publicly opinionated women, however, shall be shown to once more receive vitriol from those in the game who considered rugby the business of men, and the game reflected this opinion by barring them from becoming shareholders in their local clubs.

The game's slow appreciation of the support of players' wives, evidenced by the Northern Union's decision to compensate families for loss of players' earnings during the 1920 tour of Australasia will be examined as a signifier of a deliberate move towards a more inclusive environment by the game's authorities. But it will also be suggested that the unpaid voluntary labour that wives undertook to facilitate players' successes by providing good conditions at home directly benefited the underlying capitalist ethos of the clubs and the game as a whole. The chapter will argue that the rugby league authorities' changing attitudes were no less an assertion of patriarchy, and that the state of marriage was favourable to clubs as wives avowed an ideal moral influence, so clubs actively encouraged and assisted weddings, even on match days.

The effect of industrial conflict, trade depression and high unemployment is the context of the new positions for women that were created, especially in white-collar work, which nevertheless upheld traditional gendered social structures. However, women created space for themselves in rugby via supporters' clubs that allowed them to alter the structure from within without threatening the patriarchal nature of the sport and acquired influence despite their informal roles. The roles women played and the tasks they undertook will be documented and it shall be seen that women contributed in ways that fitted with their wider lives and by utilising their domestic skills created a female community within the sport that made valuable, financial contributions to the sport at a time of falling gate receipts and fiscal strife.



Women were no strangers to volunteer work and the war allowed those middle-class women with high social status to set up funds for war-related causes. Many of these funds had their own ladies' committees that organised events and collections in the local area. Miss Fitzgerald, the Mayoress of Newcastle and the daughter of the Mayor Alderman Fitzgerald, had one such fund and her committee comprised of eighteen women.<sup>1</sup> In April 1915, a Northern Union match between Yorkshire and Lancashire was arranged, with the proceeds going to the Mayoress's War Fund. The committee and the organisers were thanked for the sale of 'over £30 worth of tickets' for the game, which saw £102 10s donated to the Mayoress's fund.<sup>2</sup> Conversely, some women found themselves with little time for organising anything beyond their immediate, personal domestic work, something especially true of players' wives. As players went to the front it was left to those women whose husbands ran businesses to run them in their absence. When Rochdale Hornets' Johnnie Baxter, who had been capped for Great Britain, England, and Lancashire, left to join the forces, his licence for the Drake Hotel was transferred to his wife, Annie, who ran the pub and looked after their young son in the absence of her husband.<sup>3</sup>

Annie Baxter was one of the lucky ones as she got to see her husband again. Johnnie returned from the war, but whether he ever recovered from his ordeal is uncertain. Many players lost their lives, but as Collins has discussed, 'no figures for the

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<sup>1</sup> *Newcastle Daily Journal*, 07 November, 1914, p.4; *Newcastle Daily Journal*, 24 September, 1915, p.4.

<sup>2</sup> *Newcastle Daily Journal*, 14 May, 1915, p.9.

<sup>3</sup> *Rochdale Observer*, 25 November, 1916, p.5.

total number of Northern Union players killed, either at professional or amateur level, were ever compiled', so we have no way of knowing exactly how many of the women in the rugby league community were left bereft of the support of their menfolk.<sup>4</sup> One such woman was Mabel Turtill, wife of the St. Helens "prince of full backs" Sydney Turtill.<sup>5</sup> Syd was a sergeant in the Royal Engineers and on April 9<sup>th</sup>, 1918, was killed whilst sleeping, from a blow to the head from a piece of shrapnel. Syd left behind Mabel and three young sons, aged between nine and four, and left Mabel the sole heir to £281 13s.<sup>6</sup> The death of Hull FC's Second-Lieutenant John "Jack" Harrison in Oppy, France, earned him the Victoria Cross 'for most conspicuous bravery and self-sacrifice in an attack'.<sup>7</sup> He left his wife, Lilian, £149 18s 10d, but to the Hull community his death inspired a gift to promote life, as Hull FC arranged a Jack Harrison V.C. Flag Day for 18<sup>th</sup> January 1919, to raise funds for a memorial cot at the Hull Royal Infirmary.<sup>8</sup> Hull FC's secretary knew that if the day was to be a success they would need women to undertake much of the collecting, so he put out a particular call for women to volunteer. Women 'in the past acted in a similar capacity' for the club and as Jack was a local teacher 'lady teachers [were] especially invited to take charge of stalls'.<sup>9</sup> The 'leading ladies' of the pantomime company were among those who proffered 'unqualified acceptance' to the invitation to help, as were the Mayoress, Mrs P. Gaskell, and her two daughters.<sup>10</sup> When the first collection notice appeared in the *Hull*

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<sup>4</sup> Collins, Tony 2006. *Rugby League in Twentieth Century Britain*, p.19.

<sup>5</sup> 'Hubert Sydney Turtill', 1911 *Census of England, Wales, Scotland, Channel Islands and Isle of Man*. Available: [www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com) [Accessed: 09 October, 2015]; Alex Service, *Saints in their Glory: The History of St. Helens Rugby League Club, 1874-1939*, (Rainhill: Self-published, 1985), p.78.

<sup>6</sup> 'Turtill, Hubert Sydney', 24 February, 1919, *England & Wales, National Probate Calendar (Index of Wills and Administrations), 1858-1966, 1973-1995*. Available: [www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com) [Accessed: 09 October, 2015].

<sup>7</sup> 'T/2<sup>nd</sup> Lt. John Harrison, M.C., E. York. R.' in *The London Gazette: Supplement 30130*, 12 June, 1917, p.5866.

<sup>8</sup> 'Harrison, John, 01 June, 1918', *England & Wales, National Probate Calendar (Index of Wills and Administrations), 1858-1966, 1973-1995*. Available: [www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com) [Accessed: 10 October, 2015]; *Hull Daily Mail*, 14 January, 1919, p.4.

<sup>9</sup> *Hull Daily Mail*, 10 January, 1919, p.2; *Hull Daily Mail*, 13 January, 1919, p.2.

<sup>10</sup> *Hull Daily Mail*, 17 January, 1919, p.6; *Hull Daily Mail*, 17 January, 1919, p.8.

*Daily Mail* outlining the details of the account, of the twenty-eight named individual helpers, twenty-three were women, collecting a total of £190 10s 11d of the £228 15s 0.5d total.<sup>11</sup> For those players who did return, the resumption of rugby league would not simply reinstate the pattern of their former lives. When the sport did begin again, in 1919, it did so with fewer fixtures. Some clubs took longer to restart than others, and the reduced gates undoubtedly affected the wages of the players that did return, having an inevitable knock-on effect on family income.

As people tried to get back to a “normal” life, so did rugby league, and as supporters began to return to the terraces, club profits began to increase.<sup>12</sup> The image below, taken in 1919, shows Hull FC’s Boulevard ground and of the 161 people nineteen are women or girls.

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<sup>11</sup> *Hull Daily Mail*, 29 January, 1919, p.4.

<sup>12</sup> *Wigan Examiner*, 31 May, 1921, p.2.



**Figure 14:** Hull F.C.'s Boulevard ground in 1919. Vera Harrison (white band on her hat) can be seen on the right of the picture, smiling as she stands next to her future husband George Myers just behind the railings at the front of the stand.<sup>13</sup>

One of those women was twenty-three-years-old Vera Mary Harrison, who can be seen at the front of the stand with her beau, thirty-one-years-old George Myers. George was a fan of Hull Kingston Rovers, but his family lived in and ran a grocery store on the corner of Airlie Street, where the Boulevard was situated, so he went to watch the “Airlie Birds” instead. However, when Vera told George’s mother, Jane, where they had been, Jane ‘immediately reprimanded her son for his ungentlemanly behaviour’ and ‘future visits were restricted to a minimum’.<sup>14</sup> The social stigma attached to women attending

<sup>13</sup> *Hull Daily Mail: Boulevard Memories*, [Photograph] 14 October, 2002, p.5.

<sup>14</sup> *Hull Daily Mail: Boulevard Memories*, 14 October, 2002, p.5.

masculine sports had survived the war intact, but Jane's strict sense of propriety did not deter Vera, and the couple were married later that same year.<sup>15</sup>

Whilst rugby league did re-attract women spectators in the post-war period, it did have a significant rival for women's scarce leisure time – the cinema – and unlike rugby league there were no social barriers to women attending. Just before the outbreak of war, author and social commentator Charles Russell noted that cinemas especially attracted women, and was 'the cheapest of all forms of entertainment' and 'did not have the disreputable reputation of either the pub or the music hall'.<sup>16</sup> For some women, especially younger waged women without children, the cinema offered a relatively cheap form of entertainment on weeknights and at weekends, but for married women with a little disposable income in her household budget, a cheaper matinée screening could sometimes fit into domestic routines.<sup>17</sup> Just after the war women frequently took babies and small children to these afternoon screenings for free, meaning that childcare was sometimes no hindrance to a little relaxation time. As Langhamer has noted, 'women's leisure in adulthood was inextricably linked to notions of duty and service'. Women who worked full-time felt entitled to some leisure time, but for married women, their financial dependence on their husbands lessened their sense of entitlement to 'leisure reward'. According to Roberts and supported by Langhamer, 'married women's leisure became

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<sup>15</sup> 'Vera M. Harrison' (sic) in *England & Wales, Civil Registration Marriage Index, 1916-2005*. Available: [www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com) [Accessed: 10 October, 2015].

<sup>16</sup> Charles E. B. Russell, *Social Problems of the North*, (London: A. R. Mowbray and Co., Ltd., 1913), p.97; Elizabeth Roberts, *A Woman's Place: An Oral History of Working-Class Women, 1890-1940*, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984), p.123.

<sup>17</sup> Ross McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures: England 1918-1951*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, [1998] 2000), p.421.

rooted in the family'.<sup>18</sup> Nevertheless, women were targeted as consumers of the cinema and magazines aimed specifically at the female sex began to be published, such as the weekly *Girls' Cinema*, which at 2d offered interviews with stars alongside beauty and fashion tips for the aspiring Hollywood glamour-puss.<sup>19</sup> What made the cinema such a rival for spectator sports in the north was the dichotomy between the north and south of England in terms of observational and participatory leisure. Ross McKibbin has commented that "people in the north tended to "watch" while those in the south tended to "do", and the cinema-going habits of the population reflected this, with people in the north of England twice as likely as their southern counterparts to go to the cinema.<sup>20</sup> The 1920s saw the building of new cinemas that offered comfort and style in which one could escape the stresses of everyday working-class domestic life, an ease of experience that the Northern Union could not match, especially on a cold, wet, winter's day, when one was required to be 'quite a heroine for leaving the fireside on such a day'.<sup>21</sup>

In spite of such conditions, some women did invest their time and money into watching rugby league. In 1921, when Featherstone visited Batley in the Northern Union Cup, 'a group of ladies hired three charabancs' so that they could be part of 10,000-strong crowd.<sup>22</sup> The following year, Leigh offered those more affluent supporters who could afford the immediate outlay 'lady and gentleman' life memberships at £15, or individuals

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<sup>18</sup> Elizabeth Roberts, *A Woman's Place*, p.123; Claire Langhamer, *Women's Leisure in England*, p.134.

<sup>19</sup> David Fowler, 'Teenage Consumers?: Young Wage-Earners and Leisure in Manchester, 1919-1939' in *Workers' Worlds: Cultures and Communities in Manchester and Salford, 1880-1939*, (eds.) Andrew Davies & Steven Fielding, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992), p.139-140.

<sup>20</sup> Ross McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures*, p.421-422.

<sup>21</sup> Ross McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures*, p.5.

<sup>22</sup> Clayton, Ian 1985. *100 Years of Featherstone Rugby*, p.42.

at £10.<sup>23</sup> The extra revenue that could be gleaned from encouraging couples to attend in this way could make a welcome difference to a club's finances, especially as the post-war boom in rugby was to be short-lived. Many clubs sought to stop revenue decreases where they could, with Warrington, who had suffered a loss of over £140 on the year and held an overdraft of £1200, proposing to reduce the charge of ladies' tickets at the end of the 1922-23 season. In order to encourage female loyalty to the club, the committee suggested that women's season tickets 'be 10s. for the first season and 7s. 6d. afterwards' and that women without season passes be charged only 9d., instead of 1s. 3d., a 6d. reduction.<sup>24</sup> Given that cinema tickets averaged at 6d., even this decrease saw rugby league spectatorship priced at a premium for working-class women.<sup>25</sup> In 1925, three years after Hull Kingston Rovers moved into its Craven Park ground, the club launched an 'appeal for ladies'.<sup>26</sup> Councillor Brown, the club's chairman hoped the club could take advantage of the "'growing interest among ladies to witness the rugby league game'". The club "'expect[ed] a big run'" on a "'special line'" of season tickets with a "'guaranteed seat in the best stand' for 17s 6d'".<sup>27</sup> Councillor Brown said this appeal to the women of East Hull for patronage was a response to the club having "'often been asked to make special provision for ladies'" and a desire to break the record for the number of season passes sold. He told the members' meeting, "'I am glad to say that they have supported us very loyally since we removed to Craven Park'" something that he considered in part to "'clean football'" and the leaving behind of

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<sup>23</sup> Leigh, *Tyldesley and Atherton Journal and District News*, 02 May, 1922, p.2.

<sup>24</sup> *The Warrington Examiner*, 09 June, 1923, p.10; *The Warrington Examiner*, 11 August, 1923, p.10.

<sup>25</sup> Ross McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures*, p.421.

<sup>26</sup> *Hull Daily Mail*, 08 August, 1925, p.4.

<sup>27</sup> *Hull Daily Mail*, 08 August, 1925, p.4.

“the effect of the environment at [their old ground] Craven Street, where the spectators were too near the players and words exchanged round the enclosure, and remarks addressed to the players were not calculated to improve the tone of the game”.<sup>28</sup>

At Hull Kingston Rovers, it was the atmosphere of the new ground that made the game more suited to women, but in Halifax, it was the women themselves that were considered a positive influence on the atmosphere of the game. In his “Rugby Outlook” column in the *Halifax Sports Courier*, the football correspondent “Frank” penned a lengthy piece on the ‘strong feminine interest’ in rugby league and asked whether women were good for the sport. He considered the amount of interest women took as ‘surprising’ and their numbers at matches ‘astounding’. He commended the ‘intelligent way the majority of them follow the game’ and considered it ‘really a pleasure and a surprise to hear many of them eulogise’ about tactical elements of the play. In his discussion, which seems complementary to women, Frank held female spectators up to different standards than men. He praised their sporting intelligence and simultaneously patronised them through his use of adjectives. The article muses that ‘if ladies attended in bigger numbers, many of the things which happen today might be gradually eliminated. Perhaps instead of “barracking” we would get more fair and honest criticism’ whilst the ‘occasional unsavoury elements’ introduced by players may give way to better methods of play. Male spectators, Frank considered, would also ‘curb their tongues when the opposite sex [were] about’.<sup>29</sup> Frank’s conclusion that ‘there are many good effects to be expected from the greater interest taken in the game by the ladies’ focussed on how women could be a positive influence on men, something which rendered them useful to the sport. Frank judged women in terms of their traditional femininity and its relationship with traditional

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<sup>28</sup> *Hull Daily Mail*, 08 August, 1925, p.4.

<sup>29</sup> All quotations from *Halifax Sports Courier and Guardian*, 02 February, 1924, p.3.



masculinity, with no regard for them as spectators equal with men. There was no mention of how the gate receipts from women increased the revenue for clubs. There was not even mention of how a mother attending and enjoying the sport may have extra influence on a (male) child wanting to play, therefore nurturing future talent. No consideration was given to the possibility that women might watch rugby league for purely selfish reasons, with the benefit of enjoyment away from work or domestic life, social time with friends or a chance to meet new people, perhaps some shared family recreation. In the *Hull Sports Mail*, “Vedette” discussed ‘Football’s Fascination’ in distinctly male terms:

During the period he is watching those movements he is enthralled, entranced. He is entirely shut off from the workaday world, and thereby gains a relaxation of the mind which otherwise he would not secure.<sup>30</sup>

Given the increasing female spectatorship, the pronoun “he” could appropriately be changed to “she” for those women who followed the sport. Women too desired escapism and relaxation and it was not long before one casualty of women’s need for such was a programme specifically aimed at them. BBC radio’s ‘Woman’s Hour’ began to lose listeners during the early 1920s and was criticised for focussing too much on domestic affairs and fashion. Women wanted, if not needed, entertainment and distraction, with the BBC discovering that women preferred ‘dance music, chamber music [...] and travel talks’.<sup>31</sup> This shift in women’s attitudes and their increased spectatorship has been somewhat neglected in discussions of the boom in attendance figures in rugby and soccer, which has largely only been considered in terms of male spectators. After the horror of

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<sup>30</sup> *Hull Sports Mail*, 12 April, 1924, p.1.

<sup>31</sup> *The Batley News*, 20 February, 1926, p.5.

war, spectators 'crying out for [the kind of football] that makes their blood run more freely through their veins' and women were looking for it too.<sup>32</sup>

Just as before the war, a woman's opinion on rugby league was not always valued, especially if it was aired in public. In 1921, "A Lady Supporter" wrote to the *Wigan Examiner* her dismay that good local players were being sent elsewhere whilst the Wigan team was made up of Welshmen. Wigan had lost a match against Swinton badly enough for her to be 'disgusted' with both the game and herself for watching it.<sup>33</sup> Her eighteen line lament triggered a sixty-eight line response from "R.A.B." accusing her of being 'just the class of supporter the club can very well do without'. He criticised her for not writing the previous season when Wigan 'gave one of the finest exhibitions of the game ever given in Lancashire' against Swinton.<sup>34</sup> Nevertheless, R.A.B.'s letter sparked many other letters written by men about Wigan's poor form. Whilst none directly addressed A Lady Supporter's letter, one wonders whether she felt somewhat vindicated.<sup>35</sup> In soccer too, women's opinions were often disparaged, so much so that women felt it necessary to suppress themselves deliberately. When one anonymous woman attended a soccer match at Halifax, her admiration of a several saves made by the goalkeeper caused her to utter the word "'fine!'", but as the goalkeeper in question was a member of the opposition she 'became the centre of amazed glances – and after that [she] was quiet'.<sup>36</sup> Towards the middle of the decade, women's opinions began to gain a little traction, especially if they belonged to the daughter of Halifax Rugby League's ex-president. When her father

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<sup>32</sup> *Halifax Sports Courier and Guardian*, 27 November, 1926, p.7.

<sup>33</sup> *Wigan Examiner*, 13 September, 1921, p.2.

<sup>34</sup> *Wigan Examiner*, 17 September, 1921, p.10.

<sup>35</sup> *Wigan Examiner*, 20 September, 1921, p.2; *Wigan Examiner*, 27 September, 1921, p.2.

<sup>36</sup> *Halifax Sports Courier and Guardian*, 19 January, 1924, p.5.

pointed out the man he deemed to be the “best player” her ‘retort was quick and curt, “The best! I think he is the worst, he cannot finish his work off, and therefore will not score tries”’. ‘The lady was right’, agreed the reporter, for ‘he who is clever in midfield, but fails to either score himself, or prevents others from doing so through shortcomings is not the best player.’<sup>37</sup>

Whilst women were encouraged to watch rugby league, they remained excluded from taking a more active role in their clubs. When Wigan’s conversion to a limited liability company was being debated at a special general meeting of members, it was declared that, should flotation take place, ‘lady members’ would be ‘barred out’ of being shareholders at the club.<sup>38</sup> Women could hold season tickets but they were treated as juniors, having the same rights as ‘apprentices and schoolboys’.<sup>39</sup> Rugby league in Wigan was reaffirmed as the business of men. Conversely, in soccer, at a Wigan Borough AFC meeting, over a thousand Wigan men heard Mr. Charles Sutcliffe, member of the F.A. Council and the Football League Management Committee opine that the exclusion of women in the local sporting landscape was odd, and he told them that

he thought the present meeting was his first public football meeting he had addressed where ladies were not present. At Grimsby many ladies also came forward and purchased shares. (The Mayor spoke to Mr. Sutcliffe, after which he remarked: “The Mayor informs me that there is a lady in Wigan who has taken up £250 worth of shares in this club.” (Applause.) May that spirit of good sportsmanship move a lot of other ladies – and gentlemen – to do the same” (Applause.).<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> *Halifax Sports Courier and Guardian*, 28 March, 1925, p.7.

<sup>38</sup> *Wigan Observer and District Advertiser*, 17 March, 1921, p.3; *Wigan Examiner*, 19 March, 1921, p.3.

<sup>39</sup> *Wigan Examiner*, 13 August, 1921, p.12.

<sup>40</sup> *Wigan Examiner*, 23 July, 1921, p.7.

With a single women shareholder, who seemingly was not present at the meeting, Wigan Borough AFC were positively progressive when compared with their more popular rugby league neighbours, where the “spirit of good sportsmanship” was denied any woman who wanted to use her money to invest in the club. Wigan were not the only club to limit the capacity of women in the business of rugby league. In 1924, the invitations for Hull KR’s ordinary general meeting of shareholders were addressed to men only.<sup>41</sup> In Halifax, the annual subscription payable by women in 1925 prohibited them from voting and taking part in the management of the club.<sup>42</sup> At the end of season members’ meeting, an alteration to rule four that required ‘all ladies [to] pay’ was passed the men allowed to vote, but not all were happy with the simple show of hands as a way of determining the issue.<sup>43</sup> The matter of women’s ticket prices were a concern for men also, who were the principal wage-earners in any household. Halifax’s decision had come at a time when disposable income had shrunk for many and like other clubs that implemented price increases for women, they risked their decision having an adverse effect; there was no consideration of the decision could potentially exclude women, who were the first to make sacrifices for the overall wellbeing of the family and its budget. Similarly in Batley, women’s admission increased fifty-eight per cent in 1926, from 5d to 1s, despite high local unemployment. It was argued that the increase brought Batley’s tickets in line with the general price across rugby league and the annual subscription of 15s was advised for regular attendees.<sup>44</sup> By sheer luck, some women who went to watch rugby league at Halifax were fiscally rewarded when they were photographed in the crowd for the *Halifax Sports Courier* and circled by the competition judges. The image below shows one such

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<sup>41</sup> Hull Kingston Rovers letter to shareholders, 19 May, 1924. RFL Archive: RFL/CR/1/H4/1.

<sup>42</sup> *Halifax Sports Courier and Guardian*, 30 May, 1925, p.3.

<sup>43</sup> *Halifax Sports Courier and Guardian*, 30 May, 1925, p.3.

<sup>44</sup> *The Batley News*, 07 August, 1926, p.5.

winner of the five shilling prize, and she was by no means unique, for women were often selected from the crowds.<sup>45</sup>



**Figure 15:** Five women enjoying the rugby at Thrum Hall, Halifax, October 1925.<sup>46</sup>

A newspaper using women in the competition demonstrates the level of interest women took in rugby and suggests that women were also readers of sports papers in numbers significant enough that the newspapers took notice. In St. Helens, Mary Lanigan certainly appeared to know her rugby league and association football codes, for in January 1924 she won £20 for correctly guessing the winners of eleven fixtures in the *St. Helen's Reporter* Football Competition.<sup>47</sup> Mary was not the first woman to win such a competition, and nor were female winners confined to the north-west. A winner of a similar

<sup>45</sup> *Halifax Sports Courier and Guardian*, 31 October, 1925, p.3; 09 January, 1926, p.6; 13 May, 1926, p.3.

<sup>46</sup> Image: *Halifax Sports Courier and Guardian*, 31 October, 1925, p.3.

<sup>47</sup> *St Helens Reporter*, 25 January, 1924, p.9.

competition in Halifax, Mrs W. Woodhead, predicted twelve of thirteen winning teams correctly and won £5, which 'for a lady is a rather smart performance', mused the newspaper.<sup>48</sup> The following year, Ruth Ingham got eleven correct to bank the £5 prize.<sup>49</sup> That women were winning prediction competitions further shows how women took their interest in sport beyond spectating.

The increase in female spectatorship went hand in hand with improvements made to grounds in both rugby and soccer and as shall be discussed later in the chapter, in rugby league, such improvements were sometimes instigated by women. At Selkirk rugby union club in Scotland there were calls for 'no less than for big sliding gates' to be integrated into their new ground, 'seeing as so many ladies now patronised rugby football'.<sup>50</sup> At Arsenal reserve matches, women were admitted free to stand in order that they could sit with a male partner if they wished, and were designated a special entrance so they avoided getting squashed among crowds of men.<sup>51</sup> Nevertheless, women at matches were still subject to the male gaze and considered a beautification of the match day scene. When nearly a quarter of the 20,000 crowd at Selhurst Park watching Crystal Palace versus Queen's Park Rangers were women, it was commented that 'in the brilliant sunshine their bright dresses gave the scene a gay touch'.<sup>52</sup> Inevitably there were disapproving voices in the press, with "Town Talker" of the *Westminster Gazette* complaining in 1927 that for rugby union at Twickenham

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<sup>48</sup> *Halifax Sports Courier and Guardian*, 14 November, 1925, p.7.

<sup>49</sup> *Halifax Sports Courier and Guardian*, 13 November, 1926, p.6.

<sup>50</sup> *Southern Reporter*, 13 December, 1923, p.11.

<sup>51</sup> *Halifax Courier and Sports Guardian*, 13 September, 1924, p.6.

<sup>52</sup> *Halifax Sports Courier and Guardian*, 04 September, 1926, p.1.

a large percentage of the hundreds of cars which filled the new motor park were driven by women, many of them unaccompanied by their men. One woman passed my car on the road in a 40 h.p. car with a swerve that “beat” my front wings by a hair’s breadth.<sup>53</sup>

The unchaperoned, driving woman was a symbol of middle-class modernity, one that “Town Talker” denigrated, an anti-modern woman mind-set shared by many.<sup>54</sup>

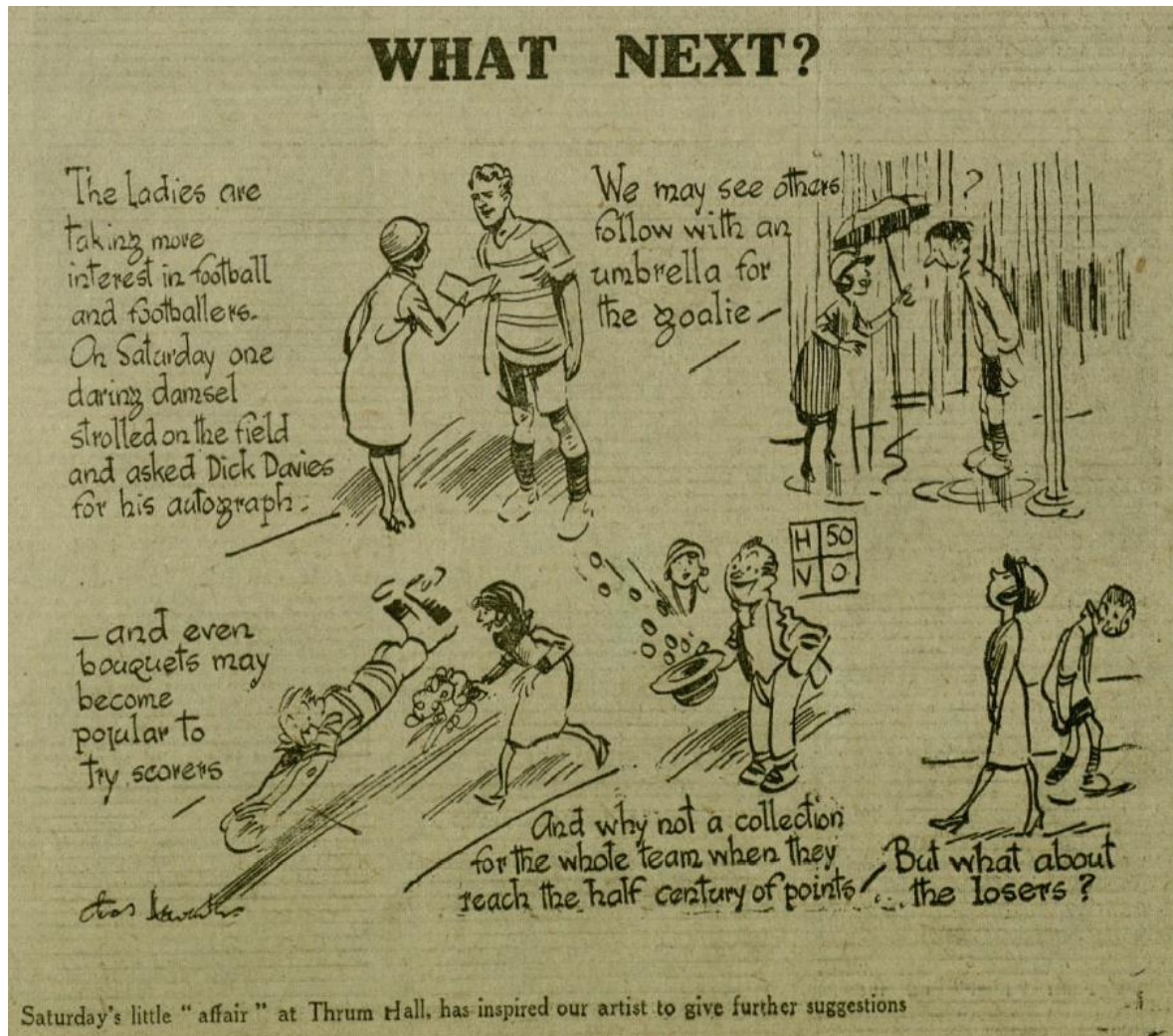
Rugby league also had its women behaving badly. On a warm September day at the start of the 1926-27 season, the poor standard of play by the home side at the Dewsbury versus Wigan Highfield fixture was posited as a result of ‘the ladies being in white dresses and the like, and it may have been this sort of thing which upset the players. At any rate, Dewsbury’s exhibition in the first half left a good deal to be desired’.<sup>55</sup> At the first game of the season it can be expected that a team may get off to a shaky start, but instead the female spectators are depicted as the teases that have a negative influence on the players, who as men cannot be trusted to control themselves. In 1925, when one ‘damsel’ at Halifax RLFC ‘strolled onto the pitch’ for Dick Davies’ autograph, the front page of the *Sports Courier* carried the following cartoon:

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<sup>53</sup> *Gloucester Citizen*, 17 January, 1927, p.4.

<sup>54</sup> *Yorkshire Evening Post*, 08 April, 1920, p.6; *Sunday Post*, 07 December, 1924, p.8; *Gloucester Journal*, 31 March 1928, p.13.

<sup>55</sup> *The Batley News*, 04 September, 1926, p.3.



**Figure 16:** Women rugby league and soccer spectators as seen through the eyes of the Halifax Sports Courier's satirical cartoonist in 1925.<sup>56</sup>

The cartoon suggests that now a woman has dared to breach the side-line, other women will not be able to resist the urge to follow, and those urges are staunchly feminine. The woman shielding a goalkeeper with an umbrella is a caring mother-figure, whilst the woman with the flowers is an adoring fan of a popular player, fawning over him as if he were a Hollywood heartthrob, and throwing coins into a collection is an offering to the

<sup>56</sup> *Halifax Sports Courier and Guardian*, 10 October, 1925, p.1.



rugby league “gods”. Yet, women are fickle creatures, suggests the cartoon, because they are only interested in worshipping the winners.<sup>57</sup>

Whilst women returned to the terraces in greater numbers, they also almost immediately returned to the ceremonial duties ascribed to them before the war, when Mrs Filan, wife of the Northern Union president, handed the cup to Leigh after they defeated Halifax in the 1921 Northern Union Cup.<sup>58</sup> In 1920, Mrs. Lewthwaite, the wife of Hunslet club president Joe Lewthwaite, after presenting Leeds and District Cup to Featherstone was allowed to address the teams.<sup>59</sup> In St. Helens, local councillor Miss Margaret Evelyn Pilkington, of the Pilkington glass dynasty, unfurled a new flag she presented to the club in front of 24,000 people at the club’s Boxing Day game against Wigan, with Lord Derby, who opened new pavilion.<sup>60</sup> Rather than smiling and remaining silent, women were making their voices heard. At a benefit for Wigan players in February, 1921, hosted by the Wigan and Great Britain player Charlie Seeling, the chairman of the benefit committee spoke of a disagreement between the committee and the rugby club over the presence of all the players at the benefit handover ceremony, ‘a capital repost was provided by Mrs. Seeling, wife of the popular host, and it gave the greatest satisfaction to all’.<sup>61</sup> Nonetheless, some clubs were slow to admit women, such as Hull FC. The first time women were allowed at a Hull FC event was April 27<sup>th</sup>, 1921, when a ‘large number of ladies [were] present’ at a presentation of benefit cheques was made to four

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<sup>57</sup> *Halifax Sports Courier and Guardian*, 10 October, 1925, p.1.

<sup>58</sup> *Leigh, Tyldesley and Atherton Journal and District News*, 03 May, 1921, p.3.

<sup>59</sup> Clayton, Ian 1985. *100 Years of Featherstone Rugby*, Leeds: Butterworth and Pilkington Ltd., p.41.

<sup>60</sup> Service, Alex 1985. *Saints in their Glory: The History of St. Helens Rugby League Club, 1874-1939*, Rainhill: Self-Published, p.82.

<sup>61</sup> *Wigan Examiner*, 05 February, 1921, p.9.

players. The chairman 'recognised that they had made a serious mistake in not taking the ladies more into their confidence, but this was a fault which he hoped would be remedied in the future'.<sup>62</sup> The ornamental nature of women at such events was expressed in the description of female attendees at the Halifax FC's jubilee ball and whist drive being 'adorned in beautiful dresses tripping round the beautifully polished rail'.<sup>63</sup>

It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a singular player in possession of rugby talent, must rely on the support of his wife

When twenty-six players left for the 1920 Great Britain tour of Australasia, it was the Northern Union that assumed the role of supporting patriarch in their long absence, distributing allowances to the players' families in order to make up for the loss of their regular wages from the family income. During the five-and-a-half months the players were away, any changes in family circumstance would result in an appeal to the Northern Union Council for additional support, such as for the wife of Oldham's Alf Wood, when, just weeks after her husband had embarked for Australia,

It was reported that the wife of A. E. Wood had been delivered of another child thus necessitating a further allowance of 7/6 per week while her husband was away.

As we have previously seen, dependants also included other immediate family members. The mother of Halifax's Alf Milnes and the sister of Huddersfield's Gwyn Thomas both successfully appealed to the Council for support, receiving 20 shillings and 10 shillings per week respectively. Some family members were unsuccessful in their appeals with Danny

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<sup>62</sup> *Hull Daily Mail*, 27 April, 1921, p.5.

<sup>63</sup> *Halifax Sports Courier and Guardian*, 22 March, 1924, p.5.

Hurcombe's father and Billy Cunliffe's mother being denied fiscal help.<sup>64</sup> The Council received applications right up until the players returned to home soil. It was October 28<sup>th</sup> before it was decided to grant Robert "Bobby" Lloyd's mother £1 per week, and 'the Council declined to entertain any further applications for dependants now that the Tour [was] over'.<sup>65</sup> Payments to all dependants ceased on October 16<sup>th</sup>, but the touring players and their families could look forward to an upcoming substantial financial windfall. The twenty-six touring players would receive a share of the tour's profits, which amounted to £28 and 10 shillings each. Only Harold Wagstaff, the Great Britain captain, would receive a lesser payment, as he had the misfortune to become injured whilst in Sydney and required surgery, resulting in the cost of his treatment, £20 11s 8d, being deducted from his share.

As the decade progressed, clubs began to recognise the importance of good relations between the administration and its playing staff. The Halifax club endeavoured to strengthen social side of their business, considering an inclusive environment a 'necessary adjunct to success'. In extending an invitation to a whist drive and concert at the Junction Hotel to players' wives and girlfriends, Halifax went some way to cementing 'good fellowship between the ruling body and the players'.<sup>66</sup> As the business of rugby league advanced, it became 'undoubtedly necessary [...] for men who take up the profession of the Rugby League game to interest themselves in a personal sense, as well as collective, in their preparation'.<sup>67</sup> In order for clubs to be successful, more became

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<sup>64</sup> Minutes of the Northern Union Council, 27 May, 1920.

<sup>65</sup> Minutes of the Northern Union Council, 28 October, 1920.

<sup>66</sup> *Halifax Sports Courier and Guardian*, 02 February, 1924, p.3.

<sup>67</sup> *Halifax Sports Courier and Guardian*, 18 October, 1924, p.7.

expected from the player away from training, especially in the professional world of rugby league, something that had consequences for their family and family life. The feeling of club boards and spectators was that

Men who take up the professional game should [...] realise that they in many respects bar themselves from much of the freedom enjoyed as an amateur. Under the former they are being recompensed for their services, and therefore, as servants, have a duty to perform.<sup>68</sup>

But if players were paid servants with duties, then women were unpaid servants with (in)voluntary duties. Away from the club, the welfare of player was largely in the hands of their wife, or in some cases, their mother. Players were expected to undertake extra fitness training, something that would take time away from their family. Wives' daily lives were especially affected, with washing routines and food preparation needing to be considered among their usual household duties. Alterations to a player's diet may require adjustments to be made in the household budget, perhaps to the detriment of the wife, who would traditionally prioritise the needs of her husband and children. At Christmas, for example, players would usually play three games in five days, and whilst spectators celebrated with Christmas dinner, players would have to be careful what they ate in order to avoid indigestion.<sup>69</sup> In taking care of their husbands, wives were facilitators of the clubs' successes, the unpaid, (in)voluntary workers on which the clubs relied for keeping players fit, healthy and content, and ready to win matches. By intermittently inviting wives into the club's "inner sanctum" on a social level, clubs were offering them something of a sweetener, a chance to relax and feel part of the club as an unacknowledged reward for their unpaid, (in)voluntary facilitation of the club itself.

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<sup>68</sup> *Halifax Sports Courier and Guardian*, 14 March, 1925, p.7.

<sup>69</sup> *Halifax Sports Courier and Guardian*, 03 January, 1925, p.7.

Matthew Taylor has argued that one striking feature of the inter-war period was 'the increasing attention given by the local and national press to "human interest" stories about [soccer] players'.<sup>70</sup> Dave Russell highlights that an article from the *Lancashire Daily Post* that featured six wives of Wembley-bound players from the FA Cup finalists Preston North End, demonstrated 'the growing focus of the northern press on the domestic lives of footballers'.<sup>71</sup> Rugby league, too, received similar coverage, for a week later 'the other Wembley wives', those of Keighley's Challenge Cup finalists, featured in a similar article.<sup>72</sup> During the inter-war years, discourse around housekeeping in newspapers and magazines presented 'domestic prescriptions of pleasurable, modern housekeeping' made easier by the slowly-increasing uptake of various domestic appliances.<sup>73</sup> Housewifery was important as 'an emotional expression of care' and the photographs of the Keighley players' wives are symbolic not only of the care they take of their husbands, but also of the care their husbands take of them.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Matthew Taylor, *The Association Game: A History of British Football*, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), p.160.

<sup>71</sup> Matthew Taylor, *The Association Game: A History of British Football*, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), p.160; Dave Russell, *Football and the English: A Social History of Association Football in England, 1863-1995*, (Preston: Carnegie Publishing Ltd., 1997), pp.104-105.

<sup>72</sup> Scrapbook 1937.

<sup>73</sup> Lucy Delap, *Knowing their Place: Domestic Service in Twentieth-Century Britain*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p.120.

<sup>74</sup> Lucy Delap, *Knowing their Place: Domestic Service in Twentieth-Century Britain*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p.99.



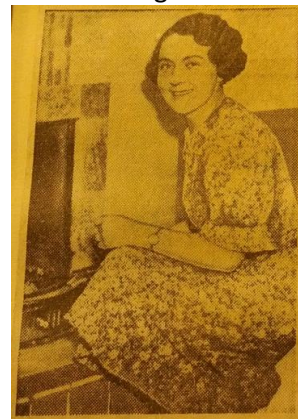
Mrs Davies 'out for a walk with her husband'.



Mrs Bevan 'writing letters at home'.



Mrs Talbot 'arranging flowers in her home'.



Mrs Towill 'by the fireside'.

**Figure 17:** Wives of Keighley players as depicted in 1937.<sup>75</sup>

It is important to note that the women are depicted in various states of domestic *leisure*. The wife of the Keighley captain Dai Davies was captured out walking with her husband, wearing a stylish hat and fur coat, symbols of his increased status and wages within the team and her increased status as the wife of the captain. The wives of Llew Bevan, Idris Towill and Fred Talbot are positioned carrying out tasks that represent the creative side of modern housewifery. The women are pictured as respectable “angels of the house” that keep comfortable homes for their husbands, and have achieved such a lifestyle that they can spend afternoons carrying out the niceties of domestic life: letter writing, flower arranging, spending a little time to one’s self by the fire, or taking light physical exercise

<sup>75</sup> Scrapbook 1937. RFL Archives.

whilst being the ideal companion for a husband. The images can be seen to corroborate what Lucy Delap noted in commentary about feminist writer Naomi Mitchison:

[Mitchison] heralded the 1930s modern domestic interior as a feminist innovation, rather than a celebration of a domestic modernity: “these bare walls, plain curtains, clean-lined, simple furniture and labour-saving devices which are typical of the very modern home, are a sign that women have other things to do”.<sup>76</sup>

However, that the Keighley wives have acquired such ideal domesticity that allows them “other things to do” is also an assertion of the patriarchy that reinforces the masculine ideal of the husband as breadwinner and provider. The players, with their increased wages from playing rugby alongside their regular employment, have provided for their wives not only a physical space in which they can create a comfortable home, but also the modern conditions that permit their women a modicum of free time to engage in other activities.

Women at home were the oil keeping the vital male cogs moving in the capitalist machine. Clubs paying players’ wages wanted men at the top of their game, winning matches, and as players were only paid on a “pay per play” basis it was up to the wife to provide optimum conditions at home for the player’s success. Wins brought clubs increased gates and improved profits. For players, winning meant bonuses in their wages, whereas losing would see players face a drop in income, so the good condition of their husband was in the family’s best interests. If a club saw a downturn in spectator receipts, the players’ families would suffer financially. Paying spectators wanted to be entertained

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<sup>76</sup> Lucy Delap, *Knowing their Place: Domestic Service in Twentieth-Century Britain*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p.120.

by the best players playing the best rugby and some believed that professionalism itself was responsible for lapses in the standard of play, for when 'high importance is attached to victory', players adopted a "win at all costs" mentality, playing the man instead of the ball and using obstructing tactics.<sup>77</sup>

A player's health and fitness mattered more to the family finances beyond the win bonuses. After a successful career at Leeds, Squire Stockwell signed for the club of his birthplace, Hunslet, but only played for the first few months of the 1924-25 season. The terms of his agreement with Hunslet stated that 'Stockwell should receive £200 on November 1, subject to there being no recurrence of his old knee injury', but after October 4<sup>th</sup> the club left him out of the team and struck him off of their register.<sup>78</sup> Stockwell failed to receive the £200 agreed and took his case to the Rugby League Management Committee, who on January 13<sup>th</sup>, 1925, declared that 'Hunslet had not proved to the satisfaction of the Committee that there had been any recurrence of Stockwell's old injury' and asked the club to uphold the agreement.<sup>79</sup> For players that suffered injury or illness, the precarious nature of their income was made worse by the casual nature of their contracts, which rendered them exempt from cover under the National Health Insurance Acts.<sup>80</sup> The clubs refused to pay any player absent through illness or injury, and the suspicion clubs harboured over the legitimacy of players' complaints was summed up by one shareholder of Batley, who vehemently believed that 'players should not have a standing wage [...] no player should draw football pay when

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<sup>77</sup> *Halifax Sports Courier and Guardian*, 18 December, 1926, p.7.

<sup>78</sup> *Halifax Sports Courier and Guardian*, 31 January, 1925, p.4; *Athletic News*, 12 January, 1925, p.1.

<sup>79</sup> *Halifax Sports Courier and Guardian*, 31 January, 1925.

<sup>80</sup> Henry J. Harris, 'British National Insurance Act of May 20, 1920' in *Monthly Labor Review*, Vol. 11, Nº 3 (1920), p.1; *Hull Sports Mail*, 13 December, 1924, p.7.



injured, only when he plays. There have been too many imaginary injuries'.<sup>81</sup> For players not registered with a club at the time of injury there was no recompense to compensation. George Bell, who was married with children, was a triallist at Batley in 1928, when he had the misfortune to break a leg during training. Having not yet signed a contract with the club he had no legal claim for compensation, so the Batley supporters' club stepped in to help. They instantly awarded him two guineas and arranged for a collection to be made at their home tie with Bradford, with a result of a further £4 10s 7d being passed on to the family. The 'thoughtful' actions of the supporters' club evidence the solidarity amongst the rugby league community in helping families disadvantaged by the sport.<sup>82</sup> Whether the Batley club donated any money to the Bell family as an act of kindness was not reported.

It was not only the nurturing of physical fitness that made marriage a favoured institution within rugby league. The "moral" influence of women on men was considered important throughout the twentieth century and coaches encouraged players to settle into marriage, believing that the institution would discourage poor behaviour and indulgence in vices. Married players and their wives could also be positive influences in the lives of the junior players, who would follow their example.<sup>83</sup> As much as marriage was considered good for the players, the extent to which rugby league was prioritised is shown in the way the sport interrupted some of those weddings it encouraged.

Dewsbury's James Lyman was married on April 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1927, the same day as the club's

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<sup>81</sup> *The Batley News*, 13 August, 1927, p.8.

<sup>82</sup> *The Batley News*, 01 September, 1928, p.7; 08 September, 1928, p.11.

<sup>83</sup> Colin Hutton, in conversation with Tony Collins, Roslyn Sullivan & Johnny Whiteley, Black History Month Public Talk (Hull History Centre, 18 October, 2014).

Rugby League Cup semi-final versus Swinton at Huddersfield. His wedding to Featherstone teacher Cissie Hale had to be hastily arranged so that James could become the licensee of a public house in Dewsbury, because the law stipulated that tenants must be married.<sup>84</sup> Immediately after the marriage, James travelled to Huddersfield to take his place in the team. Just two weeks later his teammate, James Hobson, married Hilda Main then played in a match against Leeds that afternoon. *The Batley News* much made of the appearance of Hilda and her bridesmaids, who were named in full, and the outfits of whom were described in detail.<sup>85</sup> Some reports of weddings went even further, such as that describing the union between Otley Rugby Union's H. V. Coopey and Norah Cooper. The news of the wedding reached as far as Hull, with the *Hull Daily Mail* reporting that the cake was made in shape of rugby pitch complete with posts, by the treasurer of Otley's ladies committee, Mrs. T. Rayner.<sup>86</sup>

Whilst the game could separate couples on their wedding day, it could also make marriages happen. On the first Australian tour of Great Britain in 1908-09, Albert Rosenfeld met and fell in love with Ethel Annie Barrand, a shorthand typist from Huddersfield. Albert stayed in England after the tour, signing for Huddersfield, and eventually married Ethel in 1913.<sup>87</sup> The pair remained married for the duration of their lives, visiting Australia where they met with Albert's former teammates, reminiscing how

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<sup>84</sup> *The Batley News*, 09 April, 1927, p.5.

<sup>85</sup> *The Batley News*, 23 April, 1927, p.5.

<sup>86</sup> *Hull Daily Mail*, 30 July, 1928, p.8.

<sup>87</sup> Dally R. Messenger, *The Master: The Story of H.H "Dally" Messenger and the Beginning of Australian Rugby League*, (Sydney: Angus & Robertson Publishers, 1982), p.61; 'Albert A. Rosenfeld' in *England & Wales, Civil Registration Marriage Index, 1837-1915*, Available: [www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com) [Accessed: 10 October, 2015].

Albert used to meet with Ethel in secret at her bedroom window.<sup>88</sup> When Australia's Jack Holmes arrived in England for the 1929-30 tour, little did he know that he would also meet and fall in love with a Yorkshire girl, Mary Shore, a shop assistant from Ilkley, where the touring team were based. The pair met at a dance at the King's Hall and married in a secret ceremony on Jan 8<sup>th</sup>, 1930.<sup>89</sup> At the end of the tour, Jack introduced Mary to his teammates and she accompanied him when the team met the Prime Minister, Ramsey MacDonald, who greeted Jack as "the man who travelled 10,000 miles to steal a Yorkshire girl".<sup>90</sup> Mary followed her husband to Sydney on April 2<sup>nd</sup> with over a hundred wedding gifts, arriving on May 13<sup>th</sup>.<sup>91</sup> However, unlike the Rosenfelds, their marriage was beset with misfortune. In April 1931 Mary was hit by a car and admitted to hospital in a 'serious' condition, and only five months later Jack died following an operation for appendicitis, the couple having only been married for twenty months and two days.<sup>92</sup> Jack left Mary with their young daughter, Abigail, and the Sydney newspaper *Truth* began a collection to ensure their financial security.<sup>93</sup> The "Jack Holmes Fund" raised £397 16s 6d. for Mary and Abigail by 15 November, from a benefit match between a Kangaroo representative side and Jack's club, Newtown-Western Suburbs, plus subscriptions made by the paper, rugby league clubs and supporters as well as local businesses.<sup>94</sup> Mary returned to Ilkley with her daughter in December 1931, unsure whether she would return to Australia.<sup>95</sup> These two marriages demonstrate that rugby league opened up some opportunity for transnational relationships that would otherwise have not been possible,

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<sup>88</sup> Dally R. Messenger, *The Master*, p.61.

<sup>89</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 31 March, 1931, p.2; *Recorder*, 17 January, 1930, p.1.

<sup>90</sup> *Yorkshire Evening Post*, 27 October, 1931, p.10.

<sup>91</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 31 March, 1930, p.2; *The Telegraph* (Brisbane), 13 May, 1930, p.5.

<sup>92</sup> *The Sun* (Sydney), 22 April, 1931, p.4; *The Week* (Brisbane), 16 September, 1931, p.40.

<sup>93</sup> *Truth* (Sydney), 13 September, 1931, p.5.

<sup>94</sup> *Truth* (Sydney), 15 November, 1931, p.9.

<sup>95</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 23 December, 1931, p.3.

and gave some women the chance of a new life away from the industrial north of England. Yet whilst they would leave behind the family and community ties that they had grown up with, rugby league's unique working-class community culture translated overseas, making women feel welcome and helping them out in times of distress.

## AUSTRALIAN FOOTBALLER'S BRIDE.



Mrs. Jack Holmes (formerly Miss Mary Shore), wearing a scarf in the Australian footballers' colours, being congratulated by friends at Ilkley to-day on her wedding to one of the R.L. tourists, which, as first reported in "The Yorkshire Evening Post," took place secretly last week.

**Figure 18:** The *Yorkshire Evening Post* depicts the newlywed Mary, third from the right, nine days after her marriage.<sup>96</sup>

Taking part in the business of rugby league also had financial implications for the families of some committee men. During the 1922-23 season, Warrington's 'committee

<sup>96</sup> *Yorkshire Evening Post*, 17 January, 1930, p.12.

had personally and collectively given a guarantee to the bank for an overdraft [...] and had made themselves responsible for a very large sum indeed'.<sup>97</sup> The overdraft stood at £1,200 and 'the eight committee men were liable at the bank for the overdraft to the extent of £150 each'.<sup>98</sup> Similarly in 1927, the directors at Batley underwrote the club's overdraft and were personal guarantors 'for a substantial sum each'.<sup>99</sup> The financial commitment that a director had to undertake was thought to deter 'many capable man from seeking a seat' on club boards.<sup>100</sup> Only those with middle-class incomes would consider taking on such liabilities, and those that did gained an increased social standing in the community. To celebrate the golden wedding anniversary of Charles and Sarah Holdsworth, *The Batley News* ran a substantial interview with Charles about his life and sporting memories. Charles was the Dewsbury secretary from the club's inception in 1875 until 1895 and was instrumental in the formation of club, and was also a member of Yorkshire rugby union Senior Competition committee. No detail was given about his wife, Sarah, who was mentioned in passing, but her photograph was printed *next* to that of her husband, a visual misrepresentation of the article's content and the accepted imbalance of power within contemporary marriages.<sup>101</sup>

Throughout the 1920s, waves of industrial conflict, high unemployment and depression in trade that hit the north took their toll on working-class families, and the

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<sup>97</sup> *The Warrington Examiner*, 09 June, 1923, p.10.

<sup>98</sup> *The Warrington Examiner*, 11 August, 1923, p.10.

<sup>99</sup> *The Batley News*, 30 April, 1927, p.5.

<sup>100</sup> *The Batley News*, 28 May, 1927, p.3.

<sup>101</sup> *The Batley News*, 08 September, 1928, p.10.

subsequent knock-on effect hit rugby league hard as family income was stretched to its limits. At Leigh v Rochdale, 19<sup>th</sup> April, 1921, the two-shilling minimum charge set by the Norther Union was considered 'too stiff'. A large group of men 'were determined to watch the match, and they simply could not afford to pay', so fifteen minutes before kick-off, 'the barriers of the ground were rushed in two places, and men poured on to the ground' with many thousands gaining free admission.<sup>102</sup> Another example shows that the slump in trade in the north-west affected the usually healthy Wigan versus Rochdale fixture; usually the gate averaged at approximately 15,000, but on December 10<sup>th</sup>, 1921, only 4,500 spectators were in attendance.<sup>103</sup> Undoubtedly the employment situation will have stopped many women from going to matches as in families the already limited expenditure on women's leisure would have been culled in favour of the needs of the family at large. As we have seen, women too suffered from increased levels of unemployment, but for the authorities it was men's unemployment that took priority and 'no plans had been made to solve the problem of the unemployed woman', whose wages often supplied the necessary additional funds that kept a family solvent.<sup>104</sup> The railway strike of 1924 caused the St. Helens side to remain overnight in Hull, after their long and difficult drive over the Pennines to face Hull FC, a town where the dockworkers strike that same year saw many a rugby league supporter demanding a five-day working week, something branded impossible by the employers.<sup>105</sup> The coal strike of 1926 disrupted Halifax's away fixture at Hull, with the decrease in trade generally barring people from affording to travel.<sup>106</sup> The same strike cost newly-promoted Castleford approximately

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<sup>102</sup> *Wigan Observer and District Advertiser*, 19 April, 1921, p.2.

<sup>103</sup> *Wigan Observer and District Advertiser*, 13 December, 1921, p.3.

<sup>104</sup> *Wigan Examiner*, 15 October, 1921, p.7.

<sup>105</sup> *Hull Sports Mail*, 16 February, 1924, p.6.

<sup>106</sup> *Halifax Sports Courier and Guardian*, 02 October, 1926, p.7.

£500 in missed takings up to October 9<sup>th</sup>, as striking miners gained half-price admission or opted to wait until the gates were opened at half-time to watch the second half for free.<sup>107</sup> In 1924, when ex-Huddersfield captain turned rugby league columnist Harry Lodge spoke to an audience in Warrington, he asserted that football in all its formats, was 'one of the essentials in the life of the nation and should never in cost reach the luxury standard for the working man supporter'.<sup>108</sup> This ethos ran right throughout the sport but the consequence was that it was down to clubs to accommodate a reduction in income. As the decade progressed, some clubs' accounts showed increasing losses on the seasons, such as Batley's aforementioned £1,580 deficit on the 1926-27 season. Club chairman Dr Walker expressed a view that because 'the people's pockets had been hit by the long coal strike and adverse trade conditions' he felt players' terms should have been reduced, but he had been thwarted by the club's directors.<sup>109</sup> Given that the Batley directors were now responsible for a large overdraft at the bank, they took his advice for the following season.<sup>110</sup> Players were not amenable to the reduced terms on offer, and many hesitated to renew contracts, whilst the international player Frank Gallagher refused outright and was placed on transfer list, Batley banking a much-needed £300 transfer fee for his move to Leeds.<sup>111</sup> The following season the club requested permission from the Rugby Football League to offer unemployed persons a reduced gate fee of 5d but the governing body refused, stressing that the minimum charge of one shilling for adults must be maintained 'under all circumstances'.<sup>112</sup> This was a blow to the Batley club, in a small town where

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<sup>107</sup> *Halifax Sports Courier and Guardian*, 09 October, 1926, p.3.

<sup>108</sup> *Warrington Examiner*, 05 April, 1924, p.11.

<sup>109</sup> *The Batley News*, 28 May, 1927, p.3.

<sup>110</sup> *The Batley News*, 06 August, 1927, p.5.

<sup>111</sup> *The Batley News*, 13 August, 1927, p.8; *The Batley News*, 27 August, 1927, p.7; 17 September, 1927, p.5.

<sup>112</sup> *The Batley News*, 15 September, 1928, p.11.

2,114 men and 1,322 women were unemployed.<sup>113</sup> Two months later, 'serious local conditions' saw an increase of 1,047 men and 1,110 women on the unemployment register compared with same week the previous year; the equivalent to 25 per cent of the insured employable persons in the area. The local mayor, Mr. E. Kelly, told employment committee that the

figures did not truly indicate the impoverishment caused by local unemployment for many persons signing the register had dependents, so that instead of 25 per cent they could safely say that 50 per cent of the working classes was affected by this terrible problem'.<sup>114</sup>

For the sport of the working-class north, these were dire times indeed.

## Women to the rescue

The post-war decade saw women in the north extend their reach further into areas such as local government. The 1907 Qualification of Women (County and Borough Councils) Act opened up positions in town councils to unmarried women and widows; the act upheld the marriage bar commonly in place that forced newly-married women to resign from their jobs.<sup>115</sup> Shortly after the passing of the Act, Bewdley, Worcestershire, elected Elizabeth Woodward as England's first female councillor, as women candidates standing in the northern cities of Hull, Liverpool, Newcastle and Manchester were defeated.<sup>116</sup> It was felt by some that

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<sup>113</sup> *The Batley News*, 15 September, 1928, p.12.

<sup>114</sup> *The Batley News*, 17 November, 1928, p.10.

<sup>115</sup> *The Sphere*, 02 November, 1907, p.8.

<sup>116</sup> Patricia Hollis, *Ladies Elect: Women in English Local Government, 1865-1914*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), p.396 & p.397n.



the war proved that there are few vocations open to men that cannot be filled equally well by women, and it opened up the way to the feminine invasion of the professions'.<sup>117</sup>

However, the "invasion" can be better described as a creeping infiltration into some areas by middle class women. One example comes from Halifax, where it was 1924 before the town elected its first woman councillor, the widowed Miriam Lightowler, J.P.<sup>118</sup> Grammar school educated, she had previous experience of the Halifax Board of Guardians and had become the town's first woman Justice of the Peace in 1920.<sup>119</sup> Once elected, she was the only woman among Halifax's sixty councillors. Miriam was initially appointed to the highways, gas and sewage committees, but despite her age and experience Miriam admitted that she 'was like a square peg in a round hole' on these committees, for they afforded 'little scope for a woman to exercise her talents'.<sup>120</sup> In the town council elections later that year there were no women candidates in Halifax, nor in nearby Yorkshire towns and cities such as Huddersfield, Hull, York or Doncaster. Women were 'disinclined' to enter what the *Halifax Courier* deemed the 'hurly-burly' of municipal contests; the masculine arena of public office was a battleground that demanded time, dedication and resolve, things that very few women could afford.<sup>121</sup>

Miriam's experience is interesting, because her comment suggests that her election offered little in the way of changing the structure of operations at Halifax Town Council. Whilst hordes of women did not rush to have their names on the electoral ballots,

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<sup>117</sup> *Warrington Examiner*, 20 January, 1923, p.9.

<sup>118</sup> *Halifax Courier and Guardian*, 19 January, 1924, p.11.

<sup>119</sup> *Halifax Courier and Guardian*, 19 January, 1924, p.11.

<sup>120</sup> *Halifax Courier and Guardian*, 09 February, 1924, p.12; *Halifax Courier and Guardian*, 08 November, 1924, p.6.

<sup>121</sup> *Halifax Courier and Guardian*, 08 November, 1924, p.6.

her election, like the election of other women before her, showed other women a view of the gradually changing social structures, proving that it was possible for women to operate in masculine spheres. Slowly, women with university training pushed open more and more doors of opportunity, and companies such as the Inland Revenue began to allow women to sit the entrance exam for positions there in 1923. Women not privileged by wealth, status or education however, did push forward into areas more relevant to them and their own experiences. The post-war decade saw a broadening of some occupational sex-types, and the number of women in the commercial workforce rose from 17.5 per cent in 1911 to 39.4 per cent in 1921. Between the 1870s and the 1920s, female “white collar” workers rose dramatically by a factor of eighty-three.<sup>122</sup>

Contemporary commentary placed the invention of typewriter squarely at the centre of the change, crediting it with allowing women into administrative roles hitherto reserved by men: ‘the typewriter was mainly instrumental in bringing women into the business world [...] they have done so much for the emancipation of women’.<sup>123</sup> Yet, as Margery Davies and Judith Smith have shown, it was not simply a case of women taking the place of men, but that the expansion of the tertiary sector that took advantage of the more literate working- and lower-middle-classes, the products of the various Education Acts brought into force by governments. The sector created new jobs that were sex-neutral, and the typewriter itself created new occupations that were made female from the beginning.<sup>124</sup> The typewriter was a symbol of modernity, as new technologies, communication methods and the expansion of paperwork that mirrored the increasing

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<sup>122</sup> Deborah Simonton, *A History of European Women’s Work: 1700 to the Present*, (London: Routledge, 1998), p.236.

<sup>123</sup> *Warrington Examiner*, 30 June, 1921, p.3.

<sup>124</sup> Margery Davies, ‘Woman’s Place is at the Typewriter: The Feminization of the Clerical Labour Force’ in *Radical America*, Vol. 8, Nº 4 1974, p.9.

complexity of business structures gave rise to the demand for clerical work.<sup>125</sup> The newness of the positions that women filled were not threatening to men and there was no repeat of the post-war tensions seen in the factories. Moreover, traditional gender roles external to such occupations was reflected in the

sexual divisions of labour in the office – where men hold the majority of managerial positions and women fill the majority of low-level, clerical jobs – is a division which is strengthened by the positions which men and women hold outside the office.<sup>126</sup>

The model office worker, like the model wife, ‘mastered the art of being invaluable to the men for whom they work[ed]’.<sup>127</sup> Clerical work was ‘defined in opposition to a career’, a job to be relinquished when an actual husband presented himself and therefore did not threaten the position of marriage in culture as the desired state for women.<sup>128</sup> After their war experiences, many women expected to undertake different, more interesting work, but found that such work gave women added choice but still upheld the status quo.<sup>129</sup>

But this is not to say that the expansion of women’s occupational opportunities or the admission of women into some male domains changed nothing. Judy Giles has commented on the relevance of Foucault’s and Giddens’ discourse on the dynamic ‘relationship between social structures and individual agency’, admitting the notion that women are not merely dictated to by existing structures, but that they can influence those structures in return, that there is a ‘mutually determining relation between the

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<sup>125</sup> Judith Smith, ‘The “New Woman” Knows How to Type: Some Connections Between Sexual Ideology and Clerical Work, 1900-1930’, *Berkshire Conference on Women’s History*. Radcliffe College, Cambridge, Massachusetts, October, 1974, p.12; Margery Davies, ‘Woman’s Place is at the Typewriter’ p.5.

<sup>126</sup> Margery Davies, ‘Woman’s Place is at the Typewriter’, p.21.

<sup>127</sup> Judith Smith, ‘The “New Woman” Knows How to Type’, p.11.

<sup>128</sup> Judith Smith, ‘The “New Woman” Knows How to Type’, p.1-2.

<sup>129</sup> *Warrington Examiner*, 28 April, 1923, p.9.

individual and society'.<sup>130</sup> Giles considers this theory a useful tool for feminist history that 'allows the stories and voices of the past an autonomy that [...] can intervene in the processes and meanings that reconstruct and shape their lives'.<sup>131</sup> This notion is particularly relevant in showing how rugby league supporters' clubs became sites of both power and powerlessness for women, entered into on a voluntary basis. Women created space for themselves within the existing structure of the rugby league support network, but in doing so gradually modified that structure, in a "mutually determining" relationship.

As the previous chapter discussed, some working-class women did partake in volunteer work, especially when it was for the benefit of their immediate community, but for regular, sustained voluntary work, 'the time required of such services meant that the bulk of those performing voluntary, charitable work came from the middle and upper classes'.<sup>132</sup> In the north-west, middle-class women attached themselves to causes such as hospitals, and the Mayoress of Manchester called for leisured women to donate eight hours a day to service of community, by which was meant the working-classes, believing that 'there must be no peace in the campaign against poverty, dirt, and disease, and service in this campaign is an absolute duty of the more fortunate among us'.<sup>133</sup> Vera Brittain's study of women's work found that voluntary work was

still essentially a middle-class phenomenon [...] the majority of industrial women, whether employed or not, have more than enough to do in looking after their houses and families to be able

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<sup>130</sup> Judy Giles, *Women, Identity and Private Life*, p.14; Lois McNay, *Foucault and Feminism: Power, Gender and the Self*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), p.62.

<sup>131</sup> Judy Giles, *Women, Identity and Private Life*, p.14.

<sup>132</sup> Susan R. Grayzel, *Women and the First World War*, p.47.

<sup>133</sup> *Wigan Examiner*, 22 March, 1921, p.4; Leigh, *Tyldesley and Atherton Journal and District News*, 19 May, 1922, p.3.

to undertake anything more than occasional attendance at local meetings.<sup>134</sup>

Britain focused on middle-class voluntary work, and this reflected the anxieties felt by the nation over women's moral behaviour. Middle-class women became the moral guardians of their working-class sisters by becoming factory inspectors and welfare supervisors during the war, and after it they re-extended their influence to

Social and welfare work; health work; church, parish and other forms of semi-religious occupations; preventative, prison and probationary work; educational work; the Girl Guide movement; work for women's social progress; political work, whether for parties or feminist; internationalist and imperial societies; local government; the protection and care of animals; and amateur creative work'.<sup>135</sup>

Yet, as Roberts and others have demonstrated, working-class women embodied their own form of female altruism, partaking in voluntary work within their own communities, be it childminding, cooking, cleaning, or donating items such as clothes to extended family and friends.<sup>136</sup> And it was in this way that women were able to play a significant role in rugby league throughout the inter-war years.

Prior to World War One, clubs themselves had organised social events to raise emergency funds to clear debts. In 1909, York Football Club organised a "'monster'" whist drive in which ten thousand participants were expected.<sup>137</sup> The following month, Halifax Cricket and Football Club arranged a "'Blue and White Bazaar'" in order to 'raise funds to reduce the mortgage debt of £6,500 on the Thrum Hall estate'. That women were involved in the organising of such events has been suggested but cannot be

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<sup>134</sup> Brittain, Vera 1928. *Women's Work in Modern England*, London: Noel Douglas, p.133.

<sup>135</sup> Susan R. Grayzel, *Women and the First World War*, p.35; Brittain, Vera 1928. *Women's Work*, p.136.

<sup>136</sup> Elizabeth Roberts, *A Woman's Place*, p.5 and p.179;

<sup>137</sup> *Yorkshire Evening Post*, 16 October, 1909, p.6.

ascertained.<sup>138</sup> At Wigan, women could become members of the parent club but were not entitled to participate in the decision making process. The club did form a ladies' committee of volunteers to deal with the match day catering from the home team and the visitors, which was subject to some criticism. At the Annual General Meeting of 1921, where no women were present, a Mr J. J. Robinson spoke, in a remonstrating tone:

he particularly wished to call attention to the sumptuous manner in which the Wigan club catered for visiting teams. Having noticed the great energies of the Ladies' Committee at nearly every first team match at home one could quite see that they had done this thing very elaborately. He hoped it would not be carried out in future, because there was not that kind of treatment elsewhere. He had had a little experience of that, and he hoped the directors would make a special note of that.

At the meeting the club had announced a record profit of over £3500, but had still spent £428 19s. 8d on catering versus £218 the previous year. The chairman backed the women, telling the meeting that 'they had done their very best'.<sup>139</sup> The women were volunteers but Robinson blamed the women without consideration that they were carrying out the instructions of the club and it is highly unlikely that the women had any financial control over the budget. Rugby league was more important to Wigan as a source of civic pride than for most other places and was inextricably linked to the city council, so it is highly feasible that the club would choose to cater lavishly for visitors as a display of wealth and status. Yet the women were the visible operators in this display and therefore became the scapegoats for the alleged over-indulgence and increased expenditure.

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<sup>138</sup> *Yorkshire Evening Post*, 04 November, 1909, p.5; *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, 05 November, 1909, p.3, *Athletic News*, 08 November, 1909, p.8. In his history of Halifax RLFC, Andrew Hardcastle suggested that it was the "ladies of the club" that organised the bazaar 'on four days during June', but my research shows it actually took place in November and was definitely organised by the parent club. Whilst women may have been involved I have found no documentary evidence for this and Hardcastle has not indicated his sources. See Andrew Hardcastle, *The Thrum Hall Story: A History of Halifax R.L.F.C.*, (Halifax: Self-published, 1986), p.56.

<sup>139</sup> *Wigan Observer and District Advertiser*, 09 June, 1921, p.3;

However, the financial optimism that emboldened rugby league during its first two full seasons after the war quickly faded towards the end of 1921, as a decrease in trade set unemployment soaring and the country into economic depression.<sup>140</sup> It was against this backdrop of worsening conditions that rugby league followed its cousin, soccer, in taking up the supporters' club movement. Supporters' Clubs were considered beneficial within sport, and 'if carried out in the ideal spirit of practical help and social intercourse [were] always successful'.<sup>141</sup> Bradford Northern's plight warranted interventionist measures in February 1921 by the Northern Union, who had meetings with deputations from both the club and a 'Bradford Supporters' Committee'.<sup>142</sup> This committee, itself a form of supporters' club if not in name, was the first of its kind and was closely followed by Keighley's Supporters' Committee, and then came Huddersfield, who set up the first organisation to be named a "supporters' club" on June 6<sup>th</sup>.<sup>143</sup>

Women were to play a central role in this new supporters' club movement. When Hull Kingston Rovers held a meeting to form a supporters' club on October 3<sup>rd</sup>, local rivals Hull FC were not far behind, their invitation for new members shortly after its inception issued a 'special invitation' to all 'ladies [...] desirous of being enrolled'.<sup>144</sup> Hull Kingston Rovers followed suit, and by January its 'ladies' section' was 'growing apace'.<sup>145</sup> Monthly ladies' nights were scheduled to take place at the Tigress Hotel, but proved so popular

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<sup>140</sup> Tony Collins, *Rugby League in Twentieth Century Britain*, p.23.

<sup>141</sup> *Halifax Sports Courier and Guardian*, 05 July, 1924, p.5.

<sup>142</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 25 February, 1921, p.9.

<sup>143</sup> *Hull Daily Mail*, 28 March 1921, p.2; Fartown Supporters' Jubilee Book, 1921-1971, p.7

<sup>144</sup> *Hull Daily Mail*, 21 September, 1921, p.2; *Hull Daily Mail*, 28 October 1921, p.2.

<sup>145</sup> *Hull Daily Mail*, 12 January, 1922, p.2.

that by April they required the 'increased accommodation' of the much larger Queen's Hotel.<sup>146</sup> Like at other supporters' clubs, the women at Hull Kingston Rovers did not hold any positions of authority or decision making, with positions on the executive committee being reserved for men. Nonetheless, by becoming involved, the women began to influence the structures of rugby league itself. At the Hull Kingston Rovers Rugby Football Club's annual meeting in 1922, women were admitted for the very first time, because their 'active interest in the betterment of the club' as displayed in their involvement with the supporters' club, had shown the parent club the positive contribution that women could make. The club's president, Councillor E. Brown, declared the women's presence a 'step in the right direction', not least because he believed that their presence at matches 'could only bear influence for good, and he hoped to see that in full force at Craven Park', a ground notorious for its rowdy hostility.<sup>147</sup> Judy Giles has shown that 'to lack formally legitimated power is not necessarily to be power-less although it may mean being less powerful' because 'a woman may be debarred from wielding power in certain situations but not in others'.<sup>148</sup> Rugby league supporters' clubs were arenas in which women could exert their power and have influence within the masculine sport, without requiring formal, management roles to be "legitimated" by men. Moreover, women used society's gendered expectations to garner this influence and reach their objectives. Supporters' clubs were established to help clubs financially whilst creating social opportunities for supporters away from the football field. Whilst the clubs' structures followed a traditional business imprint, their intentions linked economic good to social good and allowed for more domestic, pastoral, social roles within the organisations. Whilst the men ran the

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<sup>146</sup> *Hull Daily Mail*, 08 November, 1921, p.2; *Hull Daily Mail*, 27 January, 1922, p.2.

<sup>147</sup> *Hull Daily Mail*, 13 June 1922, p.2.

<sup>148</sup> Judy Giles, *Women, Identity and Private Life*, p.12.



committee, women, who proved domestically that they were able to organise themselves and fulfil such roles, quickly found a way to become involved. Moreover, by admitting women into supporters' clubs to undertake these roles, male gender security was assured, for as Roberts has noted, 'the majority of men believed that they proved their masculinity by never doing any domestic chore which could be construed as belonging to the sphere of women'.<sup>149</sup>

Women's membership to a supporters' club was much more affordable for working-class people and open to anyone regardless of whether they held a season's membership at the parent club.<sup>150</sup> For example, in 1924 Hull FC Supporters' Club offered membership for a couple at 2s 6d., men for 1s 6d. and women for 1s 3d.<sup>151</sup> Membership of a supporters' club was a more affordable way of "doing your bit" for your club without jeopardising the family finances. In dire economic times for all, supporters' clubs could reach where rugby clubs could not, raising vast sums of money. Keighley Supporters' Club was formed just after the Northern Union Council approved a grant of £300 for the struggling parent club, and handed over £500 in its first three years of operation to help eradicate the club's debts.<sup>152</sup> The Lancashire rugby league clubs were a little slower to take up the supporters' club crusade, but when supporters did organise them most parent clubs saw the benefits immediately. In Warrington, a supporters' club was formed

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<sup>149</sup> Elizabeth Roberts, *A Woman's Place*, p.116.

<sup>150</sup> I will use the term "parent club" to denote the rugby league teams to which supporters' clubs were affiliated, either officially or unofficially. This will aid clarity whilst maintaining the place of supporters' clubs in the rugby league hierarchy.

<sup>151</sup> *Hull Sports Mail*, 27 September, 1924, p.4.

<sup>152</sup> *Halifax Sports Courier and Guardian*, 05 July, 1924, p.5.

in September 1923 with three objects, described as ‘physical, social and financial’.<sup>153</sup> The primary function was to ‘lift the financial burden’ of the parent club’s £1,400 debt from the shoulders of its committee, to which end it ‘inaugurated a 30,000 shilling fund’ and arranged various events such as whist drives, dances and a fancy dress carnival.<sup>154</sup> In the supporters’ club’s first month it signed up eight-hundred-and-twenty-five members and had the promise of a lump-sum donation of £100. Yet even the relative affordability of supporters’ club membership did hinder those in employed industries that were suffering from the economic downturn, and one works’ department wrote to the Warrington supporters’ club enclosing a collective donation for the 30,000 shilling fund, expressing their wish ‘to do their bit, although, unfortunately, “through a shortage of work this last six months we are not members”’.<sup>155</sup> The honorary treasurer, Mr. J. Tilling, replied,

“However small the amount, this is just the kind of subscription we welcome, as it is an indication of the very spirit that the Supporters’ Club is out to encourage – the ‘Lend a Hand’ spirit. If your example could only be followed in all works, we should very soon have a large band of *real* supporters, to the benefit of the club, of the game, and of the town generally”.<sup>156</sup>

Tilling’s emphasis on the “*real*-ness” of supporters is an important one. In this context, the authentic supporter is the one who does what they can to be of help, even if they cannot fulfil the traditional ways of rugby patronage, such as attending matches and being members of the club or the supporters’ club. The concept of a “real” rugby league supporter is about an ethos and a dedication to the cause of the club’s betterment. The “lend a hand” spirit of the supporters’ club movement broadened the definition of what it meant to be a true supporter by placing the emphasis on voluntary efforts with a “do

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<sup>153</sup> *Warrington Examiner*, 06 October, 1923, p.7.

<sup>154</sup> *Warrington Examiner*, 06 October, 1923, p.7.

<sup>155</sup> *Warrington Examiner*, 10 November, 1923, p.7.

<sup>156</sup> *Warrington Examiner*, 10 November, 1923, p.7 Emphasis in original.

what you can manage” philosophy. This attitude admitted those not endowed with money and those not available on match days to become part of the rugby league community. Importantly for this study, it allowed *women*, whose lives were busy, whose leisure was limited, to find their way into the fold.

Whether interested in the sport or no, women would attend the various functions that supporters’ clubs arranged. Several hundred attended a fancy dress carnival held in Warrington’s Empire Hall, with the women’s first prize being presented by the wife of the Warrington president, Mrs Barber, to one Mrs Price, who dressed as a ‘football supporter’.<sup>157</sup> Such events would open up the world of rugby league to those women previously uninitiated and the Warrington club soon found that ‘through the ladies attending their social events they now had more ladies watching the matches’.<sup>158</sup> The supporters’ club was an initial success, having ‘raised more money during its first year than any other supporters’ club in the League’, donating £500 to its parent club 1923-24 season.<sup>159</sup> However, despite this success the dire local employment situation remained a problem, as one committee member told the first annual general meeting in December 1924:

the balance sheet was unsatisfactory in one respect: if they took away the big subscriptions given by a few people and the amount raised by the various events, little had been given by the ordinary members of the club’.<sup>160</sup>

Of the twelve hundred members of the supporters’ club, only thirty members, including officials, attended the meeting, suggesting that the local community were happy to be

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<sup>157</sup> *Warrington Examiner*, 17 November, 1923, p.6.

<sup>158</sup> *Warrington Examiner*, 05 April, 1924, p.11.

<sup>159</sup> *The Warrington Guardian*, 10 December, 1924, p.2.

<sup>160</sup> *Warrington Examiner*, 13 December, 1924, p.5.

involved in the gaiety but less inclined to pay attention to the management side of the club.

Over in West Yorkshire, Halifax Supporters' Club was also struggling. 1924 was Halifax FC's jubilee year and there was concern that the football club would only cater for more wealthy life-members and subscribers. The view of the *Halifax Sports Courier* was that 'the Supporters' Club is more in touch with the man in the street than are the Halifax Committee, and therefore can cater for their wants'.<sup>161</sup> But whilst there were two thousand season-ticket holders of the parent club, there were only four-hundred-and-twenty supporters' club members, and the events they arranged were receiving 'scant support' and were largely loss-making.<sup>162</sup> There was a general malaise towards the parent club's committee and the disenchantment amongst the membership perhaps had an adverse effect on the supporters' club.<sup>163</sup> However, in August that year, a women's committee was fashioned and resultantly the supporters' club doubled its funding for the parent club. In its first season, the women's section handed over £20 to the football club, matching the men's section, which only managed £20, even though the women gave also presented a further £7 to the men's section for supporters' club funds.<sup>164</sup> Whether the following season's much improved donation from the men of £80 (compared with £36 16s 4d from the women) was the result of the men being spurred into action by the women cannot be ascertained.<sup>165</sup> The formation of the Halifax women's committee gave

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<sup>161</sup> *Halifax Sports Courier and Guardian*, 19 January, 1924, p.4.

<sup>162</sup> *Halifax Sports Courier and Guardian*, 12 January, 1924, p.5.

<sup>163</sup> *Halifax Sports Courier and Guardian*, 12 April, 1924, p.2.

<sup>164</sup> *Halifax Sports Courier and Guardian*, 23 August, 1924, p.5; *Halifax Sports Courier and Guardian*, 04 April, 1925, p.7.

<sup>165</sup> *Halifax Sports Courier and Guardian*, 22 May, 1926, p.5.

those women some autonomy over the money they raised and caught the attention of the nearby Huddersfield club, as was reported in the Halifax press:

This extract from last Saturday's Huddersfield programme will interest the Halifax ladies: "The Halifax Supporters' Club have a committee of ladies. Now Fartown what about it?: Of course the committee need not meet together. Sighs of relief from the married men." Halifax ahead again. I hope the Halifax ladies may always keep up their enthusiasm for the Halifax club and for our game. Why should men have all the football pleasures?<sup>166</sup>

The suggestion that the sexes need not have communal meetings is indicative of the idea that men used rugby and soccer as a vehicle through which they could get away from women. Indeed, the feeling was strong in Huddersfield, because the Huddersfield Supporters' Club actively excluded women for a further twenty-six years, until 1951.<sup>167</sup> Conversely, Halifax quickly saw the benefit of having women on the team, as in the summer of 1925 the supporters' club appealed to the parent club for use of Thrum Hall's old dressing rooms so that women's section could run a tea hut and provide refreshments for spectators.<sup>168</sup> During the negotiations with the rugby club, the supporters' club

unanimously decided that a joint deputation of ladies and gentlemen supporters again interview the committee at Thrum Hall, regarding the bar, the deputation to have power to accept the officials' terms, under certain conditions decided soon.<sup>169</sup>

Whilst not in official management positions on the supporters' club committee, women at Halifax were given scope to enter the negotiations and contribute to the decision making over the terms of the agreement, the first evidence of any women having such agency within the sport. The refreshment bar opened in December that year, a task that required 'a great amount of work', but despite 'self-denial [being] the keynote of all such

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<sup>166</sup> *Halifax Sports Courier and Guardian*, 10 January, 1925, p.3.

<sup>167</sup> The late admittance of women at Huddersfield will be discussed further in Chapter Seven.

<sup>168</sup> *Halifax Sports Courier and Guardian*, 18 July, 1925, p.6.

<sup>169</sup> *Halifax Sports Courier and Guardian*, 03 October, 1925, p.7.

assistance' the women's contribution was omitted from the list of thanks at the following annual general meeting.<sup>170</sup>

Melanie Tebbutt has commented that 'women's lives were grounded in sensitivity to others' needs and behaviour, not only within the family but outside it' and throughout the north women worked for the needs of the whole rugby league "family", from the professional clubs, through to the amateur and the junior leagues.<sup>171</sup> When it came to the latter, nurturing the juniors amounted to a form of pseudo-parenting and within the St. Helens' and District Junior Rugby League it was the wives of committeemen that undertook this role, with Mrs Laughton, Mrs Connor, Mrs Birchall and Mrs Gormley being singled out for praise, alongside Mrs Greenall 'who [was] a great Junior League supporter' on her own terms.<sup>172</sup> The Ladies' Committee of Cottingham Rugby Football Club, an amateur side in the Hull and District League were indicative of those women who operated within the sport in their immediate geographical community, reflecting the 'self-enclosed, introspective nature of the working-class neighbourhoods [and women's] intimate social networks with strong ties to relatives and neighbours'.<sup>173</sup>

Many supporters' organisations underwent regeneration during the 1930s, such as Hull FC's, whose women's section reformed in 1934.<sup>174</sup> In 1936, Featherstone Rovers women formed an informal women's committee that would become officially affiliated to

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<sup>170</sup> *Halifax Sports Courier and Guardian*, 28 November, 1925, p.6; *Halifax Sports Courier and Guardian*, 19 December, 1925, p.7; *Halifax Sports Courier and Guardian*, 03 July, 1926, p.4.

<sup>171</sup> Melanie Tebbutt, *Women's Talk?*, p.4.

<sup>172</sup> *St. Helens Reporter*, 04 July, 1924, p.7.

<sup>173</sup> *Hull Daily Mail*, 26 May, 1926, p.2; Melanie Tebbutt, *Women's Talk?*, p.2.

<sup>174</sup> *Hull Daily Mail*, 03 August, 1934, p.11.

the parent club the following season. The women raised funds via whist drives, dances, lottery ticket sales and table tennis competitions. The women also provided refreshments for players at training sessions and for visiting teams on match days.<sup>175</sup> At Keighley, the rugby and cricket club combined in an effort to hold a four-day 'Sports Bazaar' to raise funds for the ailing clubs.<sup>176</sup> The women's section of the supporters' club were involved in helping to finance the initiative and the Friday was earmarked as 'Ladies' Day' and presided over by Mrs Craven Laycock.<sup>177</sup> The rugby club had also initiated a "shilling fund" to help swell the coffers and published a recipe book, in which recipes submitted by the community and included for a donation of sixpence. The soft-backed book totalled one-hundred-and-fifty pages and contained mostly recipes presented by women, but several men did also make contributions.<sup>178</sup>

Besides the immediate community, supporters' clubs offered their members a way of forming new communities of likeminded individuals. Integral to this was the arranging of "away days" that required collaboration between supporters' clubs. On a match day, delegates from the away team's supporters' club would be greeted by the home team's supporters' club and treated to their hospitality. The size of the groups varied; the image below is representative of a small excursion. Of the twenty-three people travelling from Halifax to Hull Kingston Rovers on 11<sup>th</sup> October, 1924, eight were women, including three 'lady officials' from the women's committee.

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<sup>175</sup> Ian Clayton, *100 Years of Featherstone Rugby*, pp.54-55.

<sup>176</sup> *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, 12 October, 1933, p.12.

<sup>177</sup> *Yorkshire Evening Post*, 13 October, 1933, p.16.

<sup>178</sup> Tony Collins, *Rugby League in Twentieth Century Britain*, p.33; Keighley Cricket Club and Keighley Rugby League Football Club Ltd., *Bazaar Recipe Book*, (Keighley: Self-Published, 1933). My thanks go to the archivist at Keighley Local Studies Library for their help in locating this item.



**Figure 19:** 'Off to Hull – Members of the Halifax Rugby Supporters' Club snapped at the Halifax Station on Saturday prior to their departure to Hull, where Halifax played Hull Kingston Rovers in the first round of the Yorkshire Cup'.<sup>179</sup>



<sup>179</sup> *Halifax Courier and Guardian*, 18 October, 1924, p.8.



**Figure 20:** ‘Lady Officials of the Halifax Rugby Supporters’ Club snapped at the Halifax Station on Saturday. Mrs Gledhill, Mrs J. Nichol (chairlady), and Mrs Berry’.<sup>180</sup>

Yet some day trips could be heavily subscribed, such as the first outing of Hull FC’s supporters’ club to Bramley in February 1922. When they arrived to find the match had been cancelled, the three hundred-strong throng decided to make the short trip to Fartown to watch Huddersfield versus Leeds instead.<sup>181</sup> Throughout the 1920s, these away days grew in popularity, as the example of October 1928 shows, when seven hundred travelled from Dewsbury to Hull FC.<sup>182</sup> The first Challenge Cup final to be held at London’s Wembley Stadium took place in 1929, and since its move to the capital the popular cup competition had gained an extra aura of glamour. Men and women flocked to the match from all over the north, with one newspaper commenting that

there were many girls and women among the early arrivals, for there are no keener Rugby enthusiasts anywhere than members of the fair sex. In spite of their long night journey, they were as fresh as paint, and full of eagerness to explore London.<sup>183</sup>

For many, this would have been their first trip to the capital, especially for the thousands of young boys that had been given free tickets, among whom was a young Harry Jepson, who would go on to a teaching career before becoming a stalwart administrator of both Hunslet and Leeds clubs and chairman of the Rugby League Council.

Even if women did not get the chance to go to Wembley, a Challenge Cup final could still be a significant event in their lives. In 1937, as the Keighley wives were symbols of individual rugby league families, women in Widnes, the town of Keighley’s opponents,

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<sup>180</sup> *Halifax Courier and Guardian*, 18 October, 1924, p.8.

<sup>181</sup> *Hull Daily Mail*, 20 February, 1922, p.8.

<sup>182</sup> *The Batley News*, 13 October, 1928, p.11.

<sup>183</sup> ‘Cup Final Scenes’, cutting dated 05 May, 1934. RFL Archives.

were typifying the civic and community spirit that was galvanised around the local team reaching the final. People would turn out in their thousands, lining the streets to wish their team luck on the day of departure for London. A correspondent at the *Widnes Weekly News* travelled on the train from Widnes Station somewhat 'struck' by the 'panorama of women folk and children in the main who thronged the streets and open spaces to cheer' as the train left the station. Many industrial workers "'knocked off"' to watch the train depart and 'to shout their greetings or display largely-written mottoes', such as the women at the scientific apparatus and chemicals company JW Towers and C<sup>o</sup>, Ltd.<sup>184</sup> For twenty-year-old Megan Griffiths, the occasion was momentous enough that she kept several press cuttings of the event until her death, and in 2005 her daughter Elizabeth Adlington donated them to the Rugby Football League Archives. Elizabeth wrote that even after her mother had moved to Leeds at the end of the 1930s, Widnes was always at least a 'residual interest' in her life, for 'she always commented when Widnes were doing well'.<sup>185</sup> Whilst the Widnes team were in London, one Miss Stapleton-Bretherton approached a member of the official party asking after her home town, for which she 'still retained a great affection'.<sup>186</sup>

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<sup>184</sup> *Widnes Weekly News and District Reporter*, 14 May, 1937, p.2.

<sup>185</sup> Elizabeth Adlington, *Widnes Wins the Rugby League Cup 1937* [Letter]. Personal communication to Tony Collins, 05 May, 2005. RFL Archive.

<sup>186</sup> *Widnes Weekly News and District Reporter*, 14 May, 1937, p.2.



TOWERS' WORKGIRLS AT THE  
SEND OFF

**Figure 21:** Women workers at JW Towers and Co, Ltd. take a short break to watch the Widnes team depart.<sup>187</sup>

Women could wish their team luck or even be considered lucky, and the first female human mascot identified thus far was Hull's Mary Conlon, born either in 1924 or 1926. During the 1930s, dressed in full kit as pictured below, a young Mary went out with the team and was given a souvenir cap to mark the occasion. Mary and her sister were in a care home in later life when they met the daughter of the former Hull FC player Keith Boxall, who was on the staff. Mary recalled the story and left two photographs and the cap to her upon her death.<sup>188</sup> One unnamed woman was so determined to bring luck to the Challenge Cup finalists Huddersfield that she ensured that 'every member of the team

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<sup>187</sup> *Widnes Weekly News and District Reporter*, 14 May, 1937, p.2.

<sup>188</sup> Private Correspondence.

was wearing a sprig of white heather' as they boarded the train to Wembley in 1933.<sup>189</sup>

White heather was considered particularly lucky in Scotland, as Queen Victoria had discovered during her time in the Highlands.<sup>190</sup> Huddersfield went on to beat the favourites, Warrington, twenty-one points to seventeen, so perhaps the Scottish emblem did work its magic.



**Figure 22:** Mary Conlon, Hull FC mascot in the 1930s.

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<sup>189</sup> *Yorkshire Evening Post*, 05 May, 1933, p.11.

<sup>190</sup> David Duff, *Victoria in the Highlands: The Personal Journal of Her Majesty Queen Victoria*, (London: Frederick Muller, 1968), p.149 and p.279.



**Figure 23:** The cap presented to Mary Conlon by Hull FC. Mary's name is written on the inside.

Such occasions helped bolster the camaraderie between the members within a supporters' club, but also helped form a new, wider community across the sport. This desire to reach out across the geographic boundaries was in part encouraged by the formation of the Association of Yorkshire RL Supporters' Clubs in 1923. Representatives of supporters' clubs from Bramley, Bradford Northern, Hunslet, Hull, Huddersfield, Keighley, York, Wakefield and Leeds met on March 16<sup>th</sup> at the Griffin Hotel in Leeds and thus began a network of supporters' clubs that shared best practice and collaborated to support the game.<sup>191</sup> The Association stepped in to help where there was no other assistance and set up a temporary insurance scheme whereby junior players were covered in case of injury. One such beneficiary was the future international player Leslie Adams, of the Leeds juniors, who was injured in the first match of the 1925 season. Unfortunately 'the boy's parents had incurred expense of a medical nature and the lad had been sent to a convalescent home. The period of illness extended over 3 weeks' and the Association

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<sup>191</sup> Minutes of the Association of Yorkshire Rugby League Supporters' Clubs, 16 March, 1923.

granted 'compensation to the extent of £1. 16. 8.' from the 'money in hand raised by the temporary insurance scheme'.<sup>192</sup>

Where the needs of clubs were greatest was in the stands; the accommodation that sheltered spectators was in most cases in dire need of modernisation and it was in this endeavour that women came to the fore. There were small initiatives undertaken by women, such as those in Leigh that took advantage of Flower Day to sell flowers in club colours, the object being 'covered accommodation on the popular side'.<sup>193</sup> But two of the finest examples of how women conspired to bring greater comfort to spectators comes from the neighbouring towns of Dewsbury and Batley. As we have seen, unemployment in the area caused hardship for the Batley club, and Dewsbury, only two miles away, was also affected. Despite being victorious winners of the Yorkshire Cup for the very first time in 1926, Dewsbury's attendance suffered due to the 'bad trade throughout the district' and only 'rigid economy' brought the club into a small profit by the end of the season.<sup>194</sup> Unemployment was rife, with 2016 men, 65 boys, 1799 women and 152 girls making up a total of 4032 out of work at June 26<sup>th</sup>.<sup>195</sup> The Dewsbury Supporters' Club regretted the 'lack of enthusiasm' for its cause, hence when the 'lady supporters' section' was initiated in March, it sought to help the supporters' club with a subscription appeal for the parent club and then 'inaugurate some movement on their own'.<sup>196</sup> The officers were made up of married women – president Mrs A. Fox, vice-president Mrs H. Gregory, treasurer Mrs A. Aspinall, and secretary Mrs Phineas Simpson – and whilst they 'found it impracticable' to

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<sup>192</sup> Minutes of the Association of Yorkshire Rugby League Supporters' Clubs, 26 October, 1925.

<sup>193</sup> *Halifax Sports Courier and Guardian*, 13 September, 1924, p.3.

<sup>194</sup> *The Batley News*, 12 June, 1926, p.7.

<sup>195</sup> *The Batley News*, 26 June, 1926, p.5.

<sup>196</sup> *The Batley News*, 06 March, 1926, p.3.

launch a tea room at the Crown Flatt ground they put the funds raised to 'improving the storage accommodation under the covered stand by putting windows in the bays'.<sup>197</sup> The women organised successful whist drives, but the supporters' club continued to suffer into 1927, as an 'alarming drop' in subscriptions resulted in a meagre £6 1s. from its seventy-nine members.<sup>198</sup> Yet the organisation, with £185 in its fund, proceeded to commit to meeting the cost of a new stand on the popular side of the ground. At £2000, a covered stand had to be abandoned in favour of a £1500 terrace.<sup>199</sup> Meanwhile, the women preferred to spend their money on 'filling in the five open bays' of the existing covered stand, a job which was complete in time for the start of the 1927-28 season.<sup>200</sup> By the close of that season the parent club was in profit once more and the women's committee dissolved 'as the work they had undertaken to do was completed'.<sup>201</sup> Such a single objective approach reflects the attitude some women had to financial endeavours in their own lives, 'that once the ideal level was reached, it was more important to have less work than to have more money'.<sup>202</sup> The female "penny capitalists", as discussed by Roberts, would usually hand over a successful business to 'the men of the family, who appear to have been more concerned with making money for its own sake, than for definite and finite ends'.<sup>203</sup> Similarly, the women of Dewsbury, having reached their definite goal, handed over complete responsibility for sustained fundraising back to the male committee.

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<sup>197</sup> *The Batley News*, 05 March, 1927, p.5.

<sup>198</sup> *The Batley News*, 09 April, 1927, p.5; *The Batley News*, 11 June, 1927, p.11.

<sup>199</sup> *The Batley News*, 11 June, 1927, p.11; *The Batley News*, 06 August, 1927, p.5.

<sup>200</sup> *The Batley News*, 13 August, 1927, p.8.

<sup>201</sup> *The Batley News*, 23 June, 1928, p.2.

<sup>202</sup> Elizabeth Roberts, *A Woman's Place*, p.142.

<sup>203</sup> Elizabeth Roberts, *A Woman's Place*, p.137.

Given the success of the supporters' club at Dewsbury, it is to be wondered why their nearest rivals Batley took until November 1927 to form its own. Set up to 'encourage the juniors' and explore options with regards match day catering, the neophyte club recruited four hundred members in its first two weeks, with one-third of those coming from the surrounding districts.<sup>204</sup> By January 1928 'the ladies were forming a committee for the Supporters' Club' and the president Councillor George Main reminded a crowded Textile Hall at the first meeting of 1928 that 'they all [knew] that without the ladies the men could not run anything'.<sup>205</sup> With inclement weather affecting the attendance on match days to the detriment of an average of £50 per home game, the supporters' club wasted no time in organising a whist drive and dance that attracted five hundred to the Town Hall on Shrove Tuesday.<sup>206</sup> As usual, it was the women who took charge of the catering, with *The Batley News* naming thirteen on its front page: Mrs A. Wood, W. Robertshaw, H. Gunson, J. Linfoot, P. Linfoot, I. J. Fowler, R. Hall and J. Lodge, with Misses L. Turner, M. D. Barber, A. Barber, E. Richardson and R. Harris. Of the married women, only Mrs H. Gunson and P. Linfoot did not have husbands named as event co-organisers.<sup>207</sup> The catering tradition amongst working-class women in their domestic lives was evident in the home, but also often used as a way of earning extra money on a part-time basis by 'small-scale trading [selling] certain foods and drinks from either their front parlour or back kitchen: pies, cooked hams, lemonade, ginger beer, and so on', so it made sense that women would volunteer in organising and serving refreshments.<sup>208</sup> When Batley's England international Joe Oliver was called up to play for Great Britain on their

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<sup>204</sup> *The Batley News*, 19 November, 1927, p.10; *The Batley News*, 26 November, 1927, p.10; *The Batley News*, 10 December, 1927, p.2.

<sup>205</sup> *The Batley News*, 14 January, 1928, p.9.

<sup>206</sup> *The Batley News*, 04 February, 1928, p.10; *The Batley News*, 25 February, 1928, p.1.

<sup>207</sup> *The Batley News*, 25 February, 1928, p.1.

<sup>208</sup> Elizabeth Roberts, *A Woman's Place*, p.141.



1928 tour of Australasia, the supporters' club began a kit fund and two hundred attended a dance in his honour for the cause, with the women's committee once again in command of the catering.<sup>209</sup> After Oliver's final match with Batley before the tour, the supporters' club invited 'players, directors, officials and their wives' to a special tea and presented him with a wallet containing £35, of which £10 was donated by the supporters' club. Once more, in an extension of their domestic duty, the women's committee were engaged in serving the tea.<sup>210</sup> With the renovation of the refreshment hut performed by male members of the committee, the women set about making it homely, providing a 'dainty curtain and other interior fittings' so that the 'old hut now [looked] particularly smart and cosy'. At the meeting in May Councillor Main

thanked the ladies' section for the able way in which they had served the tea and for the assistance they had given at the various social gatherings. He was sure they would make a success of the refreshment department during the summer months.<sup>211</sup>

Not only would the women's enjoyment of watching home matches would be punctuated in the name of service not self, but also their time outside of the rugby calendar, during the summer off-season.

Yet it was not all kitchen work and food preparation for the women of Batley, for they reserved Tuesday afternoons for their own social gatherings at the football club's Mount Pleasant ground, where they played whist. The women ran a separate financial account to the main body, and after their first six months had £32 in hand, whilst the

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<sup>209</sup> *The Batley News*, 07 April, 1928, p.10.

<sup>210</sup> *The Batley News*, 14 April, 1928, p.6.

<sup>211</sup> Both quotations from *The Batley News*, 19 May, 1928, p.10.

refreshments produced £12 7s 6d. for the central fund.<sup>212</sup> Once again, the women had carved out their own autonomy, controlling the money they raised, spending or donating it as they saw fit. The supporters' club as a whole had a very successful first half-year, with the combined profit being £235. The parent club lost £500 on home games during the 1927-28 season due to adverse weather conditions, and resorted to selling several players in order to turn the previous season's loss of £1,586 into a small profit of £191 3s 4d. Given the precariousness of their situation, the parent club requested that the supporters' club bestow a portion of its £200 in-hand to them for use as working capital.<sup>213</sup> But the supporters' club committee were reluctant to donate such a large sum until they themselves had raised more money, so instead members voted to give cash for shares, but this was later dropped in favour of £100 being given as a loan to be paid back with interest, and 'without stipulation as to how it shall be used'.<sup>214</sup>

The club's open air whist drive and dance, held on August 11<sup>th</sup>, just three days prior to the annual general meeting, eight hundred people convened for an afternoon and evening of joviality. The weather was 'fine' and people travelled from all over South Yorkshire, with one seventy-year-old woman attending from Salford, who 'avowed it was one of the best functions she had ever attended'.<sup>215</sup> At the first annual meeting it was clear just how much work the women put into the supporters' club events, when they were thanked by Councillor Main for their 'good work in organising whist drives and

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<sup>212</sup> *The Batley News*, 23 June, 1928, p.7.

<sup>213</sup> *The Batley News*, 11 August, 1928, p.5.

<sup>214</sup> *The Batley News*, 18 August, 1928, p.9; *The Batley News*, 08 September, 1928, p.7; *The Batley News*, 15 September, 1928, p.11.

<sup>215</sup> *The Batley News*, 18 August, 1928, p.9.

dances, and generally superintending the organisation of refreshments'. The significance of their voluntary work was apparent when the supporters' club's income was revealed:

<i>Source of Income</i>	<i>Amount</i>		
Various functions arranged by the Ladies' Section	£81	2s.	5½.
Workpeople's rugby competition	£162	8s.	2d.
Match and prize draws	£210	14s.	1d.
Whist drives and dances	£119	13s.	5d.
Members' subscriptions	£37	17s.	6d.
Collections at meetings	£5	16s.	2d.
<b>Total</b>	<b>£738</b>	<b>6s.</b>	<b>5½.</b>

**Table 1:** Batley Supporters' Club Revenue 1927-28.<sup>216</sup>

The women's events had alone secured a sizeable sum, but twinned with their contribution to the whist drives and dances, they had contributed to £200 15s 10½d., approximately thirty per cent of the supporters' club's income. That the 'trade of the district during the period of their office had been terribly bad, and that every penny that had been collected had been very hard to gain', makes their impact all the more impressive. Councillor Main thanked the women 'from the bottom of his heart', commenting that

no Club or institution could manage very well without the ladies. Every credit was due to them, and [he] mentioned specially Mrs.

<sup>216</sup> *The Batley News*, 17 November, 1928, p.11.

Arthur Wood (president of the Ladies' Section), Miss Turner (secretary), Mrs. Robertshaw (treasurer).<sup>217</sup>

The women's section had been formed in order to 'stimulate interest among their lady supporters' and amongst themselves they formed a female community around their local rugby league club. They, along with other women doing voluntary work in supporters' clubs, had turned the traditional organisational and domestic skills of women, those learned and honed within the family home, to the advantage of their local clubs.

Although women's labour within the home was deemed unworthy of a wage, when that labour was applied to rugby league it was transformed into outputs of real monetary value. When the private sphere became public in this manner, the worth of those women could be seen in pounds, shillings and pence. Moreover, that these women were willing to work in this manner of their own accord stands in opposition to the assumption that domestic work could not be pleasurable to women. They used the skills they possessed in order to create a space for themselves in rugby league, working within the patriarchal structure, whilst changing that structure to allow women agency within it. By setting up their own sections affiliated to the main (largely male) supporters' clubs, they created for themselves the opportunity to control their own actions, decision making and finances. As Elizabeth Roberts has discussed, for the working-class a debt-free life was the 'main goal of people, if they could live their life without getting into debt and meet their requirements [...] they thought that was wonderful'.<sup>218</sup> Within the rugby league family, the same goal applied and the community strived for their club's solvency

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<sup>217</sup> All quotations from *The Batley News*, 17 November, 1928, p.11.

<sup>218</sup> Elizabeth Roberts, *A Woman's Place*, p.83.

just as they strived for their own. Financial necessity, in a context where the game's masculinity was not under threat, had resulted in women now being welcomed as active, albeit limited, participants within the game.



**Figure 24:** Mother Rugby League looks after the game.<sup>219</sup>

The role of women within rugby league replicated the active, organisational role that they took within the family home. The cartoon above, from the *Halifax Sports Courier*, shows Mother Rugby League as the chief cook that has high standards. The women at supporters' clubs were the literal and metaphorical caterers for the rugby league family, serving up food and organising events of such quality that people would attend in their

<sup>219</sup> Image: *Halifax Sports Courier and Guardian*, 03 October, 1925, p.1

hundreds. Smut, the Halifax mascot, can be seen guarding the bowl of “best quality” cream, just as within the game the women’s committee of Halifax became the first substantive women’s committee, praised for its output and supplying the model for those that would follow. The women of the supporters’ clubs worked hard, enhancing the rugby league community not just for women, but for all. As Mr H. Hoyle, president of the Association of Yorkshire RL Supporters’ Clubs’ told the Batley Supporters’ Club in 1928, they could be ‘glad the ladies were taking an interest in the Supporters’ Club movement, for they did not want to be a bachelors’ club’.<sup>220</sup>

### Daughters in “The Devil’s Decade”<sup>221</sup>

The 1930s brought severe unemployment to the working-class north. At the peak of the crisis in 1932, the north’s unemployment figure was five per cent higher than the United Kingdom national average, standing at twenty-seven percent of the region’s total insured workforce. Over thirty-one per cent of cotton workers, where women were more likely than men to lose their jobs, and over forty-one per cent of coalminers were without work.<sup>222</sup>

Area	1929	1932	1934	1936	1938
North-west	13.30	25.80	20.80	13.10	17.70
North-east	13.70	28.50	22.10	16.80	12.90
a. Combined regional average	13.50	27.15	21.45	14.95	15.30
b. UK (average)	10.40	22.10	16.70	13.20	12.90
Difference: North compared to UK average (a-b)	+3.10	+5.05	+4.75	+1.75	+2.40

<sup>220</sup> *The Batley News*, 07 April, 1928, p.10.

<sup>221</sup> Claud Cockburn, *The Devil’s Decade*, (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1973).

<sup>222</sup> John Stevenson, *British Society 1914-45*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984), p.270; Sheila Rowbotham, *A Century of Women: A History of Women in Britain and the United States*, (London: Viking, 1997), p.181.

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**Table 2:** Regional percentage of insured workers who were unemployed, 1929-38.<sup>223</sup>

The decade saw ‘the overt demands for women’s emancipation in terms of political and economic change go into retreat’ as concerns about the immediate political climate – Hitler’s rule in Germany, the formation of the British Fascists and suspicion of government – ‘eclipsed the nuances of cultural change occurring in gender relations’.<sup>224</sup> For those of small economic means, class rather than gender became the enemy of women, typified by the implementation of a ten per cent reduction in standard benefits, from 17s to 15s 3d, restricting household income at a time of employment scarcity.<sup>225</sup> Married women were even more harshly treated, as the 1931 Anomalies Act immediately disqualified 180,000 married women who had paid into the system and subjected them to ‘more severe terms in order to qualify for benefit than a single man or woman’, leading to some in employment going to such lengths as hiding wedding rings in order to circumvent the marriage bar.<sup>226</sup> Furthermore, the National Government Household Means Test of 1931 affected those who had been in receipt of unemployment insurance for more than six months. Working-class households with one or more long-term unemployed members would be thoroughly scrutinised and the income of every member of the co-habiting family was taken into account, and at the time of its enactment it applied to ‘over 400,000 applicants’ for assistance.<sup>227</sup> The situation was only to get worse the following year, when unemployment soared rapidly from 15 per cent in 1930 to 22.1

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<sup>223</sup> Gavin McCrone, *Regional Policy in Britain*, (London: Allen & Unwin, 1969), p.100.

<sup>224</sup> Sheila Rowbotham, *A Century of Women*, p.173.

<sup>225</sup> Keith Laybourn, ‘Social Welfare: Public and Private, 1900-1939’ in *A Companion to Early Twentieth Century Britain*, (ed.) Chris Wrigley, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 2003), p.382

<sup>226</sup> Sheila Rowbotham, *A Century of Women*, p.174 and 179.

<sup>227</sup> Keith Laybourn, ‘Social Welfare’ , p.382

per cent in 1932, the highest level throughout the whole of the twentieth century.<sup>228</sup>

However, as Martin Pugh has stated, the 1930s were kinder to some, 'because prices actually fell faster than wages in Britain, the real value of incomes increased', meaning that the standard of living for those in employment rose by approximately sixteen per cent.<sup>229</sup>

Despite the overall rise in income value, the wages in mining and textiles decreased, so many in the north felt a sharp decline in their living standards. This reduction in working-class income, twinned with high unemployment throughout the region, spelled financial worry for rugby league, for any effect on personal incomes would result in a knock-on effect for the sport. Some clubs, such as Hull Kingston Rovers and Swinton, struggled against high debts and repeated annual losses.<sup>230</sup> Moreover, the effect of unemployment on the predominantly male spectatorship was one of demoralising emasculation. "There is nothing quite like the dole. It is the final and irrevocable disaster to working-mankind", J. H. Watson told the novelist Jack Common.<sup>231</sup> For an unemployed man with a working wife, the situation could be mortifying, as the means test ensured that his benefit allowance would be determined by her wages and that of any children, reversing the culture of the male breadwinner within the household. But attempts were made by rugby league clubs to bring the unemployed through their turnstiles. In 1931,

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<sup>228</sup> Joe Hicks & Grahame Allen, *A Century of Change: Trends in UK Statistics since 1900 [Research Paper 99/111]*, (London: House of Commons Library, 1999), p.24.. Available online: <http://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/RP99-111/RP99-111.pdf> [Accessed: 03 March 2015].

<sup>229</sup> Martin Pugh, *We Danced All Night: A Social History of Britain Between the Wars*, (London: Vintage, 2009) p.96; Joanna Bourke, *Working-Class Cultures in Britain 1890-1960: Gender, Class and Ethnicity*, (London: Routledge, 1994), p.19.

<sup>230</sup> Tony Collins, *Rugby League in Twentieth Century Britain*, p.27.

<sup>231</sup> J. H. Watson, 'The Big Chimney' in *Seven Shifts*, (ed.) Jack Common, (Wakefield: EP Publishing Ltd. [1938] 1978), p.208.



Huddersfield proposed admission for women to be halved to 6d for league and cup matches, with Broughton Rangers requesting the same for unemployed men.<sup>232</sup> At its June meeting, the Rugby Football League acquiesced to women being charged 6d for cup ties, but the request for the unemployed was lost.<sup>233</sup> Whilst many clubs reduced admission after half-time, Keighley went further and charged jobless supporters five pence for entry ten minutes after kick-off. As the regional unemployment average crept towards thirty per cent in 1932, the Rugby Football League 'officially forbade clubs' from reducing admission prices before half time, but clubs persisted and that December admission for the unemployed and women into league matches was reduced to 6d.<sup>234</sup> Now the unemployed were admitted to league matches for 6d, but women were admitted to all matches for the reduced rate, excluding touring side matches such as Widnes versus Australia in 1933, where women had to pay the same admission price as men.<sup>235</sup> Clubs in towns where unemployment was rife, such as Leigh, benefitted from the ruling.<sup>236</sup> Nevertheless it was June 1935 before clubs persuaded the League that the unemployed should also be allowed reduced entry to cup games, but not before Oldham's George Hutchins lamented that his club had previously 'had to turn as many as 2,000 and 3,000 unemployed away from cup games'.<sup>237</sup>

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<sup>232</sup> *Hull Daily Mail*, 23 May, 1931, p.5.

<sup>233</sup> *Leeds Mercury*, 11 June, 1931, p.9.

<sup>234</sup> Tony Collins, *Rugby League in Twentieth Century Britain*, p.28; Northern Rugby Football League Special General Meeting minutes, 21 December, 1932.

<sup>235</sup> Widnes v Wigan Match Programme, 14 October, 1933, p.7.

<sup>236</sup> Tony Collins, *Rugby League in Twentieth Century Britain: A Social and Cultural History*, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006), p.29.

<sup>237</sup> *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, 13 June, 1935, p.16.

Yet whilst the unemployed were gaining reductions in the summer of 1935, the Rugby Football league simultaneously sought to increase women's admission prices, putting them on par with employed men's at one shilling. George Thompson, in the *Yorkshire Observer*, wrote disparagingly about the plan in terms of punishment for women spectators:

Maybe you have been rolling up in your thousands a little too often, packing the stands and the terraces before the men could get there. Any-how, whatever you have done wrong, the Rugby League intends not to continue this privilege. They make no excuses, no apologies, and the Council and League Committee are to take joint action to make sure that you don't get into any of the senior matches at half-price. Rather "stingy" after they have encouraged you for years and you have responded with the desired support.<sup>238</sup>

At the June meeting the clubs spoke vociferously in favour of women against the proposal. The Leeds representative stated that they 'had never had so many women followers as in the last season [...] and it should be fostered', whilst Huddersfield stated that 'his club wanted to attract women, not keep them away' and an increased charge would be discouraging women, and Swinton considered the 6d charge 'an incentive to women to get men to take them to the games'.<sup>239</sup> Swinton's reasoning is an interesting one. As we have seen, women were the traditional gatekeepers of the family purse, and during this period 'the role of women in buttressing the masculinity of men – whether they be fathers, husbands, or sons – became more overt'.<sup>240</sup> Attendance at rugby, partaking in the sound and the spectacle of such a masculine sport, was one way that the emasculation unemployed men harboured could be remedied within their psyche. Employed men

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<sup>238</sup> *Yorkshire Observer*, 21 May, 1935, p.13.

<sup>239</sup> *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, 13 June, 1935, p.16.

<sup>240</sup> Joanna Bourke, *Working-Class Cultures in Britain 1890-1960: Gender, Class and Ethnicity*, (London: Routledge, 1994), p.132.

would add a further 6d to the club's revenue by taking along a female partner, but the encouragement of women to go to games with their menfolk through reduced prices would perhaps have given unemployed men a guilt-free way of using a portion of their restricted family income on leisure.

In 'an effort to win the support of the fair sex', hundreds of complimentary tickets were issued to women for Featherstone's first home game of the 1938 season, when the side entertained Hull Kingston Rovers.<sup>241</sup> In what was described at the 'townspeople's chance to save the club', in 1939 Rochdale Hornets issued a questionnaire via the *Rochdale Observer*, asking what people thought of proposed charges; club membership with entry to the popular side was a suggested 12s 6d with women and boys paying half-price.<sup>242</sup> Any person was able to respond and it is reasonable to assume that women made up a portion of the respondents. However, when a call for three hundred £10 life members was made only 'sportsmen' were appealed to by the club's management committee.<sup>243</sup> When it came to investors, of Hull FC's four-hundred-and-forty-five shareholders listed in 1939 only Eva Hardaker, whose name was memorialised in the Eva Hardaker Memorial Trophy that would be the prize in a pre-season friendly between Hull FC and Hull Kingston Rovers from 1960, failed to fit the masculine norm.<sup>244</sup> Still, the people running clubs must be men, for as Stanley Chadwick, editor of *Rugby League Review*, would go on to say, 'Like Cromwell's Ironsides those who serve on Football

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<sup>241</sup> *Hull Daily Mail*, 30 August, 1938, p.10.

<sup>242</sup> *Rochdale Observer*, 24 May, 1939, p.5.

<sup>243</sup> *Rochdale Observer*, 17 June, 1939, p.1.

<sup>244</sup> Hull FC Report and Balance Sheet, Season 1939-40.

Committees must be men “who know what they fight for and love what they know”.<sup>245</sup>

Oliver Cromwell wrote to Sir William Spring in September 1643, declaring

I had rather have a plain russet-coated captain that knows what  
he fights for, and loves what he knows, than that which you call a  
gentleman and is nothing else.<sup>246</sup>

Chadwick utilises Cromwell’s radical New Model Army of ordinary men in calling for the  
ordinary, working-class men of the twentieth century to commit to the sport they love  
and fight for its success.

Some women, however, did fight for their club in a very literal sense. Welsh Great  
Britain representative Gus Risman remembered fondly one woman at St. Helens, who  
during the 1930s ‘became the talk of the whole Rugby League’. She would position herself  
‘just by the players’ entrance to the field’ and armed with an umbrella whatever the  
weather, she would ‘crack it across the heads of the visiting players each time they came  
on or off the field’. Risman recalled

When the visitors arrived at the St. Helens ground the St. Helens  
players would pull their legs about the welcome they were going  
to get. As the players left their dressing-room, the captain always  
gave the same advice: “All right, lads, here it comes. Make it  
snappy as you go through that tunnel or else she’ll beat your  
brains out.”

Risman considered that her ‘indiscriminate’ attacks made her ‘a loveable character, a real  
enthusiast’ and felt that ‘even though her enthusiasm probably did go off the rails when  
she saw the opponents, she was harmless, and secretly we all loved her’.<sup>247</sup> One

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<sup>245</sup> *Rugby League Review*, Vol. 1, No 11, July 1947.

<sup>246</sup> ‘Letter to William Spring, September 1643’ in (ed.) Thomas Carlyle, *Oliver Cromwell's Letters and Speeches*, Vol. XX (London: Chapman & Hall, 1897), p. XX

<sup>247</sup> Gus Risman, *Rugby Renegade*, (London: Stanley Paul & Co, Ltd., 1958), p.132-133.

umbrella-toting woman who was not held with affection appeared at Hunslet's Parkside stadium in October 1930. As Oldham's James Addison was pushed over the touch line, the woman lent over and 'struck' him on the head from the stand, prompting the referee to stop the game and order the police to escort her out of the ground.<sup>248</sup> When forty-three year old Lily O'Brien of Halifax met with her friends to welcome Halifax after their defeat of York in the Challenge Cup Final of 1931, she too let her fervour get the better of her. She was arrested under section twenty-eight of the Town Police Clauses Act of 1847, which forbade the singing of 'any profane or obscene song or ballad', and the use of 'any profane or obscene language'.<sup>249</sup> Charged with 'having used obscene language', she appeared before the Halifax Borough Court and explained "'I met a few friends watching the Cup come home and I got excited. I was only cheering the blue and whites. I was very glad they had won the Cup'".<sup>250</sup> Considered 'moral' crimes, offences under section twenty-eight carried fines, or in severe cases a maximum of fourteen days in prison.<sup>251</sup> Swearing by women had been 'negatively sanctioned as unfeminine' for centuries, and as a reminder of what was considered proper behaviour Lily was given a warning before being discharged.<sup>252</sup>

In rugby league, warnings would not always result in good behaviour, and sometimes women would be on the receiving end. The Australian touring side stayed at

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<sup>248</sup> *The Yorkshire Post*, 20 October, 1930, p.14.

<sup>249</sup> H.M. Government, *Town Police Clauses Act 1847*. Available: <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/Vict/10-11/89> [Accessed: 26 April, 2014].

<sup>250</sup> *Bradford Telegraph and Argus*, 05 May, 1931, p.5.

<sup>251</sup> David Nash 'Moral Crimes and the Law in Britain since 1700' in *Histories of Crime: Britain 1600-2000*, (eds.) Anne-Marie Kilday & David Nash, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), pp.17-38; H.M. Government, *Town Police Clauses Act 1847* [online].

<sup>252</sup> *Bradford Telegraph and Argus*, 05 May, 1931, p.5; Ashley Montagu, *The Anatomy of Swearing*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, [1967] 2001), p.87.

Marlborough House hydro in Ilkley for both the 1933 and the 1937 tours and were looked after by Jennie Holden, a 'dear, kindly soul' known to everyone as "'Ma" or "Auntie Jennie". Harry Sunderland recalled her mothering the players if they became ill and defending them when it appeared they might get into trouble. Some players were getting back to their accommodation 'long after "decent hours"' and 'expected [Jennie] to let them in through the back door which was near to the room where she slept'. When Harry asked her who the perpetrators were, Jennie broke 'into tears [and] would not tell [him] their names'. Harry insisted that it could happen no longer, so she 'called the "lively lads" of the team together and explained that, against her wishes, she would have to report any late comers in the future'. Several weeks later Jennie answered an after-hours knock at the door and

before she could see any of the players who were waiting for admittance a huge travelling rug was thrown over her head. The culprits scampered up the stairs to their own beds before the helpless housekeeper could disentangle herself from the rug.<sup>253</sup>

## Conclusion

The inter-war years saw the relationship between women and rugby league return in many ways to that which existed between women and rugby in the 1880s. During the period 1895 to 1914, women appeared to take something of a lesser role as spectators and supporters than they had done previously, but after World War One women's desire to become part of the sport led to their range of involvement being expanded. As this chapter has shown, women's sphere within rugby league had expanded to include active

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<sup>253</sup> 'How we Won Battle to Oust Rugby Union for Five Years' in R3 Scrapbook (10 December 1953 to 23 April 1954, p.77. RFL Archives.

spectatorship, extensive voluntary activities and leadership roles within supporters' clubs. Rugby on the pitch remained an exclusively masculine domain, but off the field women used their skills acquired in the home and the workplace to the benefit of the sport and its supporters. As the game faced successive economic crises throughout the period, women's involvement in the sport became increasingly vital to its survival. Nevertheless, whilst women were pushing the boundaries wider within rugby league, they still operated on terms acceptable to society's masculine norms, limiting their activity to "domestic" roles and duly fulfilling expected standards of femininity. In short, they were the wives and mothers at home, to the players on the pitch and to the game as a whole.

## Chapter Five: Rugby in Liverpool: The Case of Rose Kyle

The chapter begins by considering the effect of World War Two on rugby league club finances. It examines how the sport looked to teachers to keep the game going at grassroots level both pre- and post-war, and how the increased numbers of women entering the teaching profession enabled them to use their roles to engage with the sport. It will go on to explore the personal histories of several women involved at amateur levels of the game in Liverpool, an area where the game was not as established as in the rest of the north, as a way to understand how women operated within rugby league in the post-war years. The game as a vehicle for social good in keeping children occupied and the motivations for women to engage with the sport on this basis will be investigated, as will how women used domestic-based labour to help alleviate financial difficulties under rationing, which earned them both respect and criticism in the sport.

That men's leisure affected women's lives is given a rugby league context and the personal sacrifices women made for their rugby causes, such as supporters' clubs, is demonstrated. It will be seen that in the post-war period, greater supporter activity occurred within rugby league and this new era gave women greater agency within the sport. Yet this chapter concludes that this was largely dependent upon the place of childbearing in a woman's life cycle. Finally, it considers the definitions of "work" and "leisure" and how this is applied in the context of women's experiences in rugby league.



Whilst sport played an important role in boosting wartime morale, World War Two had its inevitable effect on club finances. The Huddersfield club saw an instant drop in memberships: 1,809 membership renewal cards were distributed, with 247 going to women and youths, but of those only 467 were returned accepted by the start of February 1940. Twenty-seven per cent of women and youth members resigned, with reasons including the impossibility of returning home after a match due to the black-outs.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, rugby league struggled on through the war, although some clubs were forced to close for the conflict's duration due to the requisitioning of grounds, or because the players joined the armed forces.<sup>2</sup> Some clubs, such as Barrow, closed for many years during the war, but continued to play friendlies as 'morale boosters'. It was then that young Willie Horne began to play with the team and attracted the attention of Oldham, who offered him £300 to sign. Barrow, his hometown team, offered £250, but Willie's mother 'tipped the scales in Barrow's favour. She did not want her son to leave the town' in spite of the higher offer. Within a decade, her son became 'an idol of the crowd' and went on to captain Great Britain.<sup>3</sup> As one southern-Cumbrian town gained a star, at the northern side of the Lake District another lost its light, as Seaton's matriarch, Mrs Bell, passed away in June 1942. A stalwart of local committees, Mrs Bell counted the Seaton Rugby League women's committee as one of those to which she was dedicated. For the Bells, rugby was a family affair, with her late husband and three sons being involved in the sport.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Huddersfield Daily Examiner*, n.d (c. Feb 1940). Miscellaneous cuttings, RFL Archives.

<sup>2</sup> Tony Collins, *Rugby League in Twentieth Century Britain*, pp.74-76.

<sup>3</sup> Cutting dated 03 April, 1953 in *R2 Scrapbook: 28 March. 1953 to 09 December, 1953*, p.5. RFL Archives.

<sup>4</sup> *Miscellaneous newspaper cutting*, 1942, courtesy of Alan Bell, Workington.

Other than from parental stimulus, schoolboys could be influenced into playing the game by their teachers. 'The fortunes of schoolboy rugby league fluctuated' during the inter-war period, but efforts were made to encourage youngsters to play.<sup>5</sup> Some supporters' clubs set up boys' teams affiliated to their parent clubs, such as Halifax, who in 1927 reported a loss of £310 on the running of the team.<sup>6</sup> In nearby Huddersfield, the effort was co-ordinated by teachers, who formed the Huddersfield Schools Rugby Association in 1919. Teaching had become more accessible to educated women during the latter part of the nineteenth century, a trend that continued into the twentieth, and 'where women had represented 54.3 per cent of elementary teachers in 1875, by 1914 they represented 74.5 per cent', earning a national average wage of £96 per annum.<sup>7</sup> Between 1921 and 1931, teaching was the most popular of the professions open to upper working-class and middle-class women, making up 58.5 per cent of women in the professions in 1921, a total of 203,802 teachers. By 1931 the number had declined slightly, to 199,560 women teachers.<sup>8</sup> Working-class women could enter the profession by undertaking a four-year apprenticeship as a pupil-teacher and often had classroom management skills that degree-educated women did not possess. 'As Mary Hatch, née White, born in Dewsbury in 1886, put it, even "before we went to college we knew how to handle a class 'cos we had to"''.<sup>9</sup> Given the proliferation of female teachers and the popularity of rugby league amongst women, it is perhaps surprising that the first reference to a female teacher coaching the sport originates as late as 1932, when at the

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<sup>5</sup> Tony Collins, *Rugby League in Twentieth Century Britain: A Social and Cultural History*, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006), pp.40.

<sup>6</sup> Minutes of the Association of Yorkshire Rugby League Supporters' Clubs. Meeting 22 July, 1927.

<sup>7</sup> Gerry Holloway, *Women and Work in Britain Since 1840*, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2005), p.122; Gillian Sutherland, *In Search of the New Woman: Middle-Class Women and Work in Britain, 1870-1914*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), p.117.

<sup>8</sup> Gerry Holloway, *Women and Work in Britain*, p.154. See also: Guy Routh, *Occupation and Pay in Great Britain 1906-1979*, (Basingstoke: Macmillan, [1965] 1980), pp.16-17.

<sup>9</sup> Gillian Sutherland, *In Search of the New Woman*, p.121.

Huddersfield Schools Rugby Association ‘Miss Tansey from St Patrick’s became the first female teacher to join the committee at the AGM’ on July 8<sup>th</sup>. The minute books of the Association show that she was the only female teacher on the committee for the eighty years since records began in 1919. Miss Tansey’s last meeting was October 13<sup>th</sup>, 1933, and the reason for her departure from the Association went unrecorded.<sup>10</sup> During World War Two, Winifred Powell, teacher at Wakefield’s St Austin’s Catholic school, took the helm of the sporting provision and as a result was the first rugby coach for many a young boy attending the school.<sup>11</sup> Winifred left St Austin’s just after the conclusion of the war, entering the Carmelite Order of nuns on August 15<sup>th</sup>, 1946, where she “lived a very happy and holy life” until her death at the age of 91 in 2006.<sup>12</sup>

After World War Two the encouragement of the game in schools was considered vital if rugby league was to become a national, rather than a northern, game. When Bill Fallowfield took up the secretary role at the Rugby Football League in 1946 his ‘first move’ was to attempt to ‘get more schoolboys interested in the game’ by training teachers to coach their pupils in the sport.<sup>13</sup> Fallowfield proposed

to bring into his scheme members of the Council and players of international repute as lecturers and to contact directors of education, firstly in districts where the game is already established and later further afield.<sup>14</sup>

Fallowfield was, according to Colin Hutton, who was playing for Widnes at the scheme’s inception and would become involved during the early 1950s, ‘light years ahead of his

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<sup>10</sup> Minute Books of the Huddersfield Schools Rugby Association, University of Huddersfield. I am grateful to David Thorpe for bringing this information to my attention.

<sup>11</sup> Terry Kelly and Dominic Gilroy, *Wakefield’s Sporting Catholics*, (Wakefield: Self-published, 1999), p.46.

<sup>12</sup> *Wakefield Express*, 18 October, 2006. Available: <http://www.wakefieldexpress.co.uk/news/nun-dies-aged-91-1-944227> [Accessed: 07 August, 2013].

<sup>13</sup> *Liverpool Echo*, 07 September, 1946, p.4; *Yorkshire Evening Post*, 01 November, 1947, p.3.

<sup>14</sup> *Liverpool Echo*, 07 September, 1946, p.4.

time'.<sup>15</sup> The first three-day session for training players and ex-players in the art of coaching took place at Headingley in August 1948 with forty attendees. Fallowfield's aim was to train the players in coaching methods and communication so that they would be equipped to productively engage with current players and youngsters alike.<sup>16</sup> In January 1949, the first sessions teaching schoolteachers took place in Huddersfield with thirty in attendance.<sup>17</sup> Fallowfield recruited Huddersfield's player-coach Alex Fiddes and Bradford's international second-row forward Trevor Foster to give lectures on the basics of the game, such as ball-handling, passing, evasive running and tackling.<sup>18</sup> Whether any women teachers followed in the footsteps of Miss Tansey in Huddersfield was not documented, but the presence of Kathleen Geraghty at the course in Wigan that April earmarked her as 'the first woman coach in the town'.<sup>19</sup> In her personal life Kathleen was a fan of the game and a season ticket holder at the Wigan club. Professionally, she was a teacher at Warrington Lane Junior School, and her ambition was 'to raise a team to win the schools' league for eleven years' old pupils'.<sup>20</sup> Alongside the lessons from Fallowfield, Foster and Fiddes, Kathleen and the twenty-seven male teachers were shown a film of 'well-known Australian players in action' and treated to talks by 'directors of the Wigan club, players, and Mr Jim Sullivan, Wigan's trainer-coach'.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Colin Hutton, *Rugby League Coaching Photograph* [Letter]. Personal communication, 01 September, 2014.

<sup>16</sup> *Yorkshire Evening Post*, 21 August, 1948, p.3; *Hull Daily Mail*, 27 August, 1948, p.4.

<sup>17</sup> *Yorkshire Evening Post*, 22 December, 1948, p.8.

<sup>18</sup> *Yorkshire Evening Post*, 05 January, 1949, p.8; *Wigan Examiner*, 22 April, 1949, p.7.

<sup>19</sup> *Wigan Examiner*, 22 April, 1949, p.7.

<sup>20</sup> *Wigan Examiner*, 22 April, 1949, p.7.

<sup>21</sup> *Wigan Observer*, 23 April, 1949, p.5.



**Figure 25:** Rugby Football League Coaching Team at Central Park, Wigan, April 20-22, 1949. Kathleen Geraghty can be seen in the centre. In front of her on the left is Bill Fallowfield, next right is Trevor Foster, who is next to Alex Fiddes.<sup>22</sup>

### Stanley's Fairy Godmother

The contribution of women like Miss Tansey, Winifred Powell and Kathleen Geraghty have almost been completely lost from history. Because they were unpaid volunteers, records of which are notoriously difficult to source, their contribution went almost entirely unrecorded. But they were also almost lost in the ether because, as women, their voluntary support was expected, taken for granted and not thought worthy of acknowledgement. Given the dearth of written records about their experiences, we can only begin to understand their rugby activity and how it was shaped and mediated by gendered notions of female participation by using personal history. Partly in the way that Robert Roberts' autobiographical *The Classic Slum* allowed us to enter into the world of the poorer sections of Salford's Edwardian working class, the use, where available, of female rugby volunteers' personal histories will enable us to understand the limits and extent of women's participation in rugby in the post-war years.

<sup>22</sup> Rugby Football League Coaching Team at Central Park, Wigan, April 20, 21 and 22, 1949 [photograph]. RFL Archive.

Prior to World War Two it was the 'secondary school teachers on Merseyside [who] did a great job of work' in organising the schools' game. They were assisted in their efforts by Warrington secretary Bob Anderton, who organised a series of cinema lectures showing films from the 1934 and 1936 tours.<sup>23</sup> It is impossible to say whether Fallowfield took inspiration from the Liverpool rugby activists, but the spirit of encouragement towards the sport resonated through the bomb blasts of the Liverpool blitz and the community was quick to resurrect the main Liverpool Stanley senior club in 1946. Writing in the November issue of *Rugby League Review*, Tom Reynolds held up the 'soccer centre of Liverpool' as an exemplar of how, 'where a rugby ball had never been seen, it was possible in a couple of seasons to organise and popularise rugby league football'.<sup>24</sup> Soccer, he felt, was at an advantage with children because it could be played anywhere with only a ball and some space, but rugby needed to be 'provided for [...] it must be equipped and organised [...] it takes very little money indeed to maintain leagues of schoolboys'. Reynolds considered rugby needed assistance not least due to the domestic expense of rugby on household finances being a deterrent, rhetorically asking

Did YOU never go home with your braces bust, your vest in half  
or missing, large lumps out of your shirt or pants, and all  
regarded as nothing for the sake of that try you scored? Rugby is  
heavy on ordinary togs; and mothers are heavy on rugby!<sup>25</sup>

What the sport required was mothers who were light on chastisement, but heavy on *facilitating* rugby, and Liverpool had such a weighty woman who set the post-war standard. Her name was Rose Kyle:

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<sup>23</sup> *Liverpool Echo*, 07 September, 1946, p.4.

<sup>24</sup> *Rugby League Review*, Vol. 1, Nº 2, October 1946, p.3; *Rugby League Review*, Vol. 1, Nº 3, November 1946, p.12.

<sup>25</sup> *Rugby League Review*, Vol. 1, Nº 3, November 1946, p.12. Emphasis in original.

Mrs Kyle, who finds the material, makes the shirts and pants, and simply slaves for Liverpool Stanley, is not the only supporter who began by laughing at the strange game called rugby – and ended up among its most fervent supporters.<sup>26</sup>

Mrs Kyle, far from slaving for the wealth of the club, did so for its very survival.



**Figure 26:** Rose, aged 20.<sup>27</sup>



**Figure 27:** Rose, aged 32.<sup>28</sup>

Rose Muriel Kyle, née Simpson, was born on 26<sup>th</sup> February, 1911, one of six children begat by Harriet and Arthur Edward Simpson. The Simpsons lived in a terraced house on Ash Street, in the Bootle area of Liverpool, before moving to the Old Swan district just prior to Arthur entering the armed forces in 1914. Rose attended St. Anne's Church of England Primary School, on Prescot Road and was an exemplary student. Six-year-old Rose received a certificate from the Liverpool Education Committee that was 'awarded to the scholar in the infants' department [...] for regularity, punctuality and attendance, and for general good conduct during the year 1917'. Two years later, just

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<sup>26</sup> *Rugby League Review*, Vol. 1, N° 3, November 1946, p.12.

<sup>27</sup> Carole Kyle, *Rose Kyle aged 20* [Photograph].

<sup>28</sup> Carole Kyle, *Rose Kyle aged 32* [Photograph].

after her younger sister Rita was born, the family moved to the Huyton area, where Rose would spend a significant part of her life. Rose was closest to her brother, Sydney, who was only fourteen months older than her. In her written memories of her family, Rose wrote of her relationship with her brother: 'we could never be separated. Everybody always thought we were twins. Wherever my brother went I went too, along with his friends, Tom Scully, Charlie Dixon, Johnny Mitty and John Kyle'.<sup>29</sup>

Friendship turned to romance for in 1927, aged seventeen, Rose became engaged to her brother's friend, John Robert Kyle, who was four years her senior. When Rose turned twenty, the pair wanted to marry, and John asked Rose's father, Arthur, for his permission. Arthur refused because he felt Rose was too young. Parental control over marriages was a cultural practice that had continued for centuries, and the 1753 Marriage Act, still in force when Rose and John became engaged, explicitly stated that no person under the age of twenty-one could be married without their parents' permission.<sup>30</sup> Looking for reprieve, Rose and John went along with her mother, Harriet, to seek the magistrate's permission to marry. Arthur attended court and testified his position, but the magistrate overruled his wishes and granted the couple a marriage licence on the grounds that John could support his future wife. The couple wed on December 21<sup>st</sup>, 1930 and, as Arthur refused to attend his daughter's wedding, Rose's brother Mick gave her away.<sup>31</sup> The following September, Rose gave birth to her only child, named John Robert

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<sup>29</sup> Written memories of Rose Kyle read verbatim: Carole Kyle, *Rose Kyle and Rugby League* [Recorded Interview] 06 February, 2015.

<sup>30</sup> H.M. Government, 'The Law of Marriage' *UK Parliament Website* <http://www.parliament.uk/about/living-heritage/transformingsociety/private-lives/relationships/overview/lawofmarriage-/> [Accessed: 03 June, 2014].

<sup>31</sup> Carole Kyle, *Rose Kyle and Rugby League* [Recorded Interview] 06 February, 2015.



after his father but known as Jack, and the Kyles became a close family.<sup>32</sup> Prior to the Second World War, John worked at Goodlass, Wall and Lead Industries Ltd, a paint manufactory, where he played in the soccer, darts and baseball works teams. He entered the auxiliary services as a fireman during the war, where Rose joined him as a cook. She told Carole Kyle, her daughter-in-law, that 'once someone didn't come for their dinner so she put it on their head'.<sup>33</sup>

Rose, John, and Jack lived 53 Coral Avenue, Huyton, an end of terrace, two-bedroomed house. At this time Huyton, a town just seven miles outside of Liverpool's centre, was fairly close to the city but far enough away for children to be sent there to escape the Luftwaffe's bombing of Liverpool during the war.<sup>34</sup> This combination of being geographically removed from the city but not isolated from it, meant that culturally Huyton assimilated many issues from which the city suffered, not least because of the increased number of 'townies' moving to the area. The census of 1951 showed an increase in the population of nine-hundred-and-seventy-three per cent, but a 7.8 per cent decrease for Liverpool. For one resident, Irene, Huyton was a veritable playground:

Huyton was full of farms and fields so there was loads for us kids to do. Especially like for so many of us we had moved from town and as proper townies we were used to the old cobbled streets, with the gas lights, so seeing a field for us lot was great.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> In order to avoid confusion between father and son, I will follow Carole Kyle's example and refer to John Robert Junior as Jack from hereon in. Also, this is how he was known to his family and friends and undoubtedly how he would like to be remembered.

<sup>33</sup> Carole Kyle, *Rose Kyle and Rugby League* [Recorded Interview] 06 February, 2015.

<sup>34</sup> *Childhood Memories of Huyton*, Available: <http://www.knowsley.gov.uk/pdf/Part%20three.pdf> p.38.

<sup>35</sup> *Childhood Memories of Huyton*, Available: <http://www.knowsley.gov.uk/pdf/Part%20three.pdf> p.1.

However, at least one resident, Mr C. Frank Shaw, felt that 'Huyton children [were] gravely menaced in health, moral and spiritual' by their unfettered freedom. He wrote

Children in Huyton, especially in the Longview district, are finding in public places certain used objects and are using them as toys. [...] For the decent Huyton parents, so long accustomed to the hooliganism and discipline-lack of the children of the indecent ones [...] this is the last straw.<sup>36</sup>

In Britain during the 1930s and 1940s, 'the condom was still the most popular method of contraception', and it is these that were the "objects" of ire.<sup>37</sup> The problem, it seems, was not restricted to Merseyside, as C. Frank Shaw noted that the *Catholic Herald* had 'recently had the courage to describe similar happenings in another part of the country'.<sup>38</sup> As Jones has stated, after World War Two 'the responsibility for birth control still rested with women' and the implication from Shaw's letter is that, alongside his Catholic abhorrence of contraceptives, the sexuality of young women is at fault.<sup>39</sup> Shaw felt 'this [was] a matter of education for the adult and of provision of social outlet for both the adult and the young person. Huyton possesses none'.<sup>40</sup> C. Frank Shaw, whose efforts to 'divert the minds and energies of all away from such anti-social and horrible practices' were linked to the Catholic church, neglected to acknowledge the energies being made to provide activities for the community just eight hundred metres from his own doorstep, on Coral Avenue.<sup>41</sup> Just three months earlier, the Coral Avenue Social and Athletic Club was formed 'to promote a more sociable feeling in the avenue and also for the provision of organised games for the children in an endeavour to keep them off the streets', and it

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<sup>36</sup> *Prescot and District Reporter*, 30 November, 1945, p.1.

<sup>37</sup> Robert Jütte, *Contraception: A History*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2008), p.201.

<sup>38</sup> *Prescot and District Reporter*, 30 November, 1945, p.1.

<sup>39</sup> Helen Jones, *Health and Society in Twentieth Century Britain*, (Abingdon: Routledge, [1994] 1997), p.132.

<sup>40</sup> *Prescot and District Reporter*, 30 November, 1945, p.1.

<sup>41</sup> *Prescot and District Reporter*, 30 November, 1945, p.1.

was amidst this feeling of community spirit that the Kyles dwelt.<sup>42</sup> The issue of anti-social behaviour, as it would be described in modern parlance, was of consequence to mothers, for they could be fined if their children played prohibited games in the street. When four mothers were fined 5s for their young boys playing street football illegally, they demanded to know where their boys could play as the local park was also restricted space. Their complaints were dismissed as 'not the concern of the magistrates' and no attempt was made to answer their question.<sup>43</sup>

After the war, rationing remained in place and like other sports, rugby league was suffering against a backdrop of textile shortages. Widnes sent out an 'S.O.S.' in August 1945 for boot coupons after their players played in 'stockinged feet' during a trial match, much to the mirth of supporters and George Green of the *Liverpool Echo*, who suggested that work boots, carpet slippers and even high heels might suffice in substitution.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> *Prescot and District Reporter*, 24 August, 1945, p.1.

<sup>43</sup> *Prescot and District Reporter*, 08 February, 1946, p.2.

<sup>44</sup> *Liverpool Echo*, 21 August, 1945, p.2; *Liverpool Echo*, 21 August, 1945, p.3.



Figure 28: Widnes send out an S.O.S. for boots.<sup>45</sup>

Liverpool Stanley, however, did not suffer for long. In the summer of 1946, 'whilst most teams were at their wits' end wondering where their jerseys for the season were coming from', Rose set about hand stitching a new kit for Liverpool Stanley. Liverpool Stanley had risen from the ashes of Wigan Highfield (subsequently London Highfield), in 1934. In 1939 they were the winners of the Lancashire league, but the onset of war interrupted efforts to embed the game fully into Liverpool life. With the resumption of the sport in August 1945, Stanley got off to an excellent start, with two thousand spectators attending their opening game against York.<sup>46</sup> Rose's interest had, according to the *Liverpool Echo*, 'only

<sup>45</sup> *Liverpool Echo*, 21 August, 1945, p.3.

<sup>46</sup> *Prescot and District Reporter*, 31 August, 1945, p.2.

blossomed since Stanley came to Liverpool' and she was just the kind of supporter that the fledgling team needed and encouraged. She

acquired from the mills coupon-free material, and made up the jerseys and shorts in her spare time. Luckily Stanley were thus saved the necessity of appealing to their followers for clothing coupons for a new kit, a procedure which many teams have had to adopt.<sup>47</sup>

The shirts were made in black and white, the adopted colours of Lord Derby, Edward Stanley, heir apparent the nearby seat of Knowsley. The *Echo* lauded Rose, opining that she had 'earned inclusion in that select band' of 'willing and enthusiastic voluntary workers' whilst giving the team 'an incentive to be as outstanding as their colours'.<sup>48</sup> The *Echo's* seemingly glorifying statement typifies the prevailing attitude that had emerged in the inter-war period: whereas men were naturally accepted in the male domain of sport, women had to earn their place through unpaid labour. Not only did Rose make the shirts, but she washed them too. When, in 1947, Rose 'stepped off the pavement onto some orange peel and broke her knee in three places' she had a temporary sojourn in a convalescent home and the *Prescot and District Reporter* duly announced that 'Stanley's fairy godmother is sick', perhaps indicative of her social standing in the community.<sup>49</sup> Reminding the community of her voluntary work for the club, the paper recalled that her hard work went beyond just making the kit:

to avoid damaging the black portion of the jerseys by bleaching the white, she cleaned the white with a toothbrush each week. She also washed and ironed their boot laces while her husband scraped and cleaned the boots.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> *Liverpool Echo*, 07 October, 1946, p.6. See also: Mike Brocken, *Liverpool City RLFC: Rugby League in a Football City*, (London: London League Publications, Ltd., 2008), p.59.

<sup>48</sup> *Liverpool Echo*, 07 October, 1946, p.6.

<sup>49</sup> Carole Kyle, *Rose Kyle and Rugby League* [Recorded Interview] 06 February, 2015; *Prescot and District Reporter*, 02 May, 1947, p.2.

<sup>50</sup> *Prescot and District Reporter*, 02 May, 1947, p.2.

Rose's efforts for Liverpool Stanley were substantial, especially given that war rationing were still affecting daily living, especially the lives of women. As "Housewife" of nearby Rainhill wrote to the *Reporter*, 'we are faced with almost soapless washdays' amongst the multitude of restrictions placed upon households.<sup>51</sup>



**Figure 29:** Liverpool Stanley playing in Rose's handmade kit, donated in 1946.<sup>52</sup>

Yet Rose took on not one kit, but two. In November of 1946, Huyton Juniors was formed, and the Kyle family were at the heart of it, for Rose was listed as the club's secretary in the *Rugby Football League Official Guide* for five seasons from 1947-48 and was the first woman to be mentioned in the guide since it began to be published. Huyton Juniors, coached by Rose's husband, John, played in the St Helens Junior Rugby League and home was a pitch at Page Moss Lane. Initially the club catered for boys aged fourteen to seventeen, but from 1948 until 1952 it catered for seventeen to nineteen year olds,

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<sup>51</sup> *Prescot and District Reporter*, 16 May, 1947, p.3.

<sup>52</sup> Carole Kyle, *Liverpool Stanley, 1946*, [Photograph].

which coincided with the age of Rose's son, Jack. This was no coincidence, because it was Rose herself who was credited with the club's formation:

helped by her enthusiastic husband, she formed a team composed of boys under 18 years of age and met with a certain amount of success. For in their first season the boys reached a first four position in the St Helens Intermediate League being defeated in the semi-final playoff.<sup>53</sup>

The duties of club secretary would have included replying to correspondence, ensuring the club's registration with the league, organising and cancelling fixtures and making any necessary arrangements for travel. Even when Rose broke her knee, she carried on with her secretarial responsibilities, mostly by post. She was also able to find 'a new ground for the boys at Blue Bell, with dressing accommodation at the Community Centre adjoining the ground'.<sup>54</sup> Rose clearly took her secretarial role seriously and that she also washed the kit for the entire team shows that she was very much Huyton Juniors' matriarch, combining organising with fulfilling domestic needs.

Rose took up her needle once more, hand-making Huyton's entire kit from scratch.

Carole spoke of how Rose thought practically about the kit's design:

She said "they couldn't read the numbers on their backs because of them being striped shirts, so I thought to myself that if I put a square of white on then the numbers could be put on." I don't know whether the numbers were painted on but she said "I could put the numbers on and then they could be seen by everybody, they didn't get lost in the stripes". She said "I went and got all these old used flour sacks" which you could buy in those days and people used to make aprons out of them and that sort of thing or things for the kids to wear when they didn't have anything. She said "I cut them up into squares and I bleached

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<sup>53</sup> *Prescot and District Reporter*, 21 October, 1949, p.4.

<sup>54</sup> *Prescot and District Reporter*, 21 October, 1949, p.4.

them all and stitched them on the shirts and put the numbers on". She said it was a wonderful thing everybody could see the numbers. They were all raving about it, apparently.

It was believed locally that Rose

was the first one to ever do that in the country with the kids and after that other people started doing it. That was her invention!

Rose's ingenuity, whether she was actually the first to use flour bags in this way or no, epitomises the skill and creative thought that women employed in their domestic lives, especially when faced with a limited budget and government restrictions. Rose had made two full rugby league kits in such circumstances and undertook the washing of them.

Carole recalled with wonder that Rose worked incredibly hard:

I don't know how on earth she took home all these boys clothes on a Saturday night, washed them all, starched them all, ironed them all; she did not have a washing machine or a dryer, so it was hand washed in the sink and then she had a big wooden roller in the outside that she used to put them through. The house must have been dripping in water while she tried to get them all dry by the fire. I can't imagine how she managed to do all that.<sup>55</sup>

Washing was a site of contention in post-war Liverpool, one played out sporadically in the local press. K. Cowan of Longview, Huyton, in a letter to the *Liverpool Echo*, suggested that local housewives suffered from a lack of clothes drying space and she posited that the proliferation of damp washing contributed to high rates of influenza and the common cold. Cowan called for women to be consulted on local issues, writing:

put women on an advisory committee. We know what we want, and for the men's own comfort they should see we get these necessities. If we are to build a better Britain we must depend on our women to make happy homes, for here it is that characters are formed.<sup>56</sup>

For Rose, the presence of washing was a manifestation of her contribution to building the characters of the Huyton boys through rugby league. The Kyle home became a veritable

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<sup>55</sup> Carole Kyle, *Rose Kyle and Rugby League* [Recorded Interview] 06 February, 2015.

<sup>56</sup> *Liverpool Echo*, 14 June, 1946, p.3.



laundry for this community activity so that Jack Kyle could take part in the sport on Saturdays. It is interesting that Carole thought Rose would dry the washing by the fire, because for “Fair Play” the display of washing drying outside on Sundays was an irksome display of housewifely ineptitude. ‘It is most depressing to look out on lines of washing every Sunday when one wants to feel free of work and worry’, she lamented in a letter to the *Liverpool Echo*:

The greatest offenders are young wives and mothers who seem incapable of washing without their husbands’ help. It is unfair to husbands and neighbours, and a sign of bad housekeeping.<sup>57</sup>

As Tebbutt has described, ‘cramped housing conditions often spilled [women’s] domestic life over into the public realm of the street’ and washing was a tangible example of how the private lives of households were often held up to public scrutiny and judgment by the local community.<sup>58</sup> The standards by which women’s domestic performance were held had ‘risen considerably in working-class communities by the inter-war period’ and one cannot help but wonder whether Rose would have been judged harshly by “Fair Play” or whether she would have been commended for her service to the community had she dried the team’s washing outside on a Sunday.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> *Liverpool Echo*, 25 January, 1949, p.3.

<sup>58</sup> Melanie Tebbutt, *Women’s Talk?*, p.142.

<sup>59</sup> Melanie Tebbutt, *Women’s Talk?*, p.148.



**Figure 30:** Huyton Juniors' semi-final side, 1949-50.<sup>60</sup>  
Jack Kyle can be seen on the left of the front row.

By February 1949 Jack Kyle had been selected to represent the St Helens league against the Manchester league in a district representative match, alongside two teammates, Molyneux and Brunt, and his father, John, who was elected trainer.<sup>61</sup> Later that year, the team drew attention to itself by posting two 'phenomenal scores' in quick succession, winning 53-2 and 111-0, the latter, against Liverpool Rangers, being considered a record score for a junior game in the St Helens district.<sup>62</sup> Once more it was Rose who was credited as the primary driving source behind the team's success. 'Mrs. Kyle has toiled for two years to get the game going down Huyton Way', wrote the Intermediate League secretary, and the record win 'speaks volumes for the hard work she and her husband have put into the game'.<sup>63</sup> The club's success prompted the Liverpool Stanley Supporters' Club to make enquiries about taking on Huyton Juniors as a nursery

<sup>60</sup> Carole Kyle, *Huyton Juniors' Semi-Final Side, 1949-50* [Photograph].

<sup>61</sup> *Prescot and District Reporter*, 11 February, 1949, p.2.

<sup>62</sup> *Prescot and District Reporter*, 11 February, 1949, p.2; *Prescot and District Reporter*, 21 October, 1949, p.6.

<sup>63</sup> *Prescot and District Reporter*, 21 October, 1949, p.6.

for their parent club. However, the reluctance of the Kyles was noted at a meeting on November 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1949: Mr and Mrs Kyle did not wish to lose control, but agreement had been reached that boys be passed onto Stanley Juniors when they passed the age limit for Intermediate League'.<sup>64</sup> The following month saw Huyton Juniors play a curtain-raiser versus Whitehaven Juniors, and the minutes show that it was Rose with whom they corresponded over the organisational details.<sup>65</sup> Rose remained at the helm of Huyton Juniors until the end of the 1951-52 season, after which the club disappears from the *Rugby Football League Official Guide*. Her son, Jack, would have been too old to play for the club after the end of the 1950-51 season, but Rose kept up her commitment to the club for a further year. She also appears listed as a member of the Merseyside Amateur Rugby League Association committee in 1955, but a lack of any other documentary evidence means one cannot ascertain just how long or from when she was involved in the organisation. Whatever her reasons for becoming involved in rugby league, Rose broke new ground for rugby league in the soccer stronghold of Liverpool, and in the game as whole, as T.H. wrote in the *Echo*:

it appears that women are forcing their way into football management and really making a fine job of it. No small credit for Rugby League football becoming an established fact in Huyton is due to Mrs R, Kyle, the only women secretary of a Rugby club that I know.<sup>66</sup>

Carole recalls meeting Jack in the February of 1956, the year after his National Service ended. Jack was twenty-four and Carole was seventeen. The pair were together

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<sup>64</sup> Minutes Liverpool Stanley Supporters' Club: 22 November, 1949.

<sup>65</sup> Minutes Liverpool Stanley Supporters' Club: 20 December, 1949.

<sup>66</sup> *Prescot and District Reporter*, 21 October, 1949, p.4.

four years before marrying in 1960, because, just had happened to Rose, Carole's parents would not let her marry until she reached twenty-one because she 'didn't know [her] own mind'.<sup>67</sup> Jack resumed playing rugby league after his return from the army, playing for Liverpool Hall and Liverpool City's A-team, and was asked to turn professional. Carole remembered that Jack did seriously consider it:

He was thinking about it but then we were courting. We did a lot of dancing and I got fed up every Saturday night. He'd come with his eye all stitched up and next week his nose would be all bunged up with cotton wool and he couldn't stop it bleeding, or he'd cricked his ankle at Blackpool or something. So it was a bit of an annoyance. And then he was going to come into our business, which we'd had, like my grandfather and then my dad, and then actually Jack and I ran it until we came to America. I said this is going to be difficult because if you sign up you're going to have to go at night times to go and practise, and then you're going to go away or play at home every Saturday. That's not going to fit in with our shop because it's busy on a Saturday. So we'd gone to St Helens on a day out, probably to the market [...] and we met one of his friends, Terry, who had gone professional and he was on crutches. Jack said "what happened?" and [Terry] said he'd had some injury or other. He said "John, it's nothing like when we used to play in Liverpool" so that sort of made Jack's mind up and he said "I'll pass on that".<sup>68</sup>

Jack later spoke to *The Evertonian Magazine* and cited Carole as the deciding influence:

'my wife – though she wasn't my wife then – put the boot in, as you might say. She wasn't going to marry someone who was getting knocked about!'.<sup>69</sup> Carole only went with the Kyle family to watch one match, and as the team were one short Jack was unexpectedly asked to play. 'I turned round every time he got the ball', she said 'because I didn't like to

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<sup>67</sup> Carole Kyle, *Rose Kyle and Rugby League* [Recorded Interview] 06 February, 2015. Carole's mother said many years later: 'to think I wouldn't let you get married because you didn't know your own mind; I couldn't have had a better son-in-law in all the world if I'd have handpicked him myself'.

<sup>68</sup> Carole Kyle, *Rose Kyle and Rugby League* [Recorded Interview] 06 February, 2015.

<sup>69</sup> *The Evertonian Magazine*, c.1973; Carole Kyle, *Rose Kyle and Rugby League* [Recorded Interview] 06 February, 2015.

see him get smashed in the face! I never actually saw him make a play!'.<sup>70</sup> When asked about Rose's behaviour at the game, Carole replied that 'she knew all about rugby. She knew what they should be doing'.<sup>71</sup>

After his rugby league days were over, Jack took on other sporting interests, such as assisting Peter Craven, a world championship winning speedway rider from Liverpool, becoming an agent and collector for Everton Football Club and taking up golf. Carole said 'he was into all sorts of sports. Wherever he went he used to end up working so we didn't pay to get in anywhere'.<sup>72</sup> Carole's testimony demonstrates how men's leisure time could have an inordinate effect on women's lives, as Jack himself acknowledged in his interview with *The Evertonian*. He used to take Carole's mother with him to Everton, leaving Carole and her father to run their newsagent business and look after the couple's two young children, Julia and Russell. 'Sometimes I give Everton a miss in order to let my wife have a break... which means she goes to Goodison', he said. Carole had to then take her mother to the match and see to the lottery tickets that Jack had sold in the week.<sup>73</sup> For two generations of the Kyle family, leisure time was dominated by services to sport.

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<sup>70</sup> Carole Kyle, *Rose Kyle and Rugby League* [Recorded Interview] 06 February, 2015.

<sup>71</sup> Carole Kyle, *Rose Kyle and Rugby League* [Recorded Interview] 06 February, 2015.

<sup>72</sup> Carole Kyle, *Rose Kyle and Rugby League* [Recorded Interview] 06 February, 2015.

<sup>73</sup> *The Evertonian Magazine*, c.1973; Carole Kyle, *Rose Kyle and Rugby League* [Recorded Interview] 06 February, 2015.



**Figure 31:** L-R: Jack, Rose and John.<sup>74</sup>

Rose was the first, but not the only woman rugby league club secretary listed in the 1940s. The year after Rose's name appeared, a Miss A. Lightfoot spent a year as secretary for the Young Conservatives club in the Widnes and District Amateur Rugby League. At the same time, over in Yorkshire, twenty-two-year-old Cora Hadfield was preparing for her marriage to Ronald Haley. The Haleys were a family from Overthorpe, a village near Dewsbury. The family were deeply involved in Overthorpe Rangers, which was very much a community club, as Cora described:

I first got involved because I married a Haley, and the Haleys, five or six of them were Overthorpe Rangers. My husband was president. All the neighbours were Overthorpe Rangers. They supported us in the only way they could and there wasn't a lot of money around then. We played and I would say we weren't a top

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<sup>74</sup> Carole Kyle, *Jack, Rose and John* [Photograph].

team, [we] were mediocre, [it] didn't bother us. We played. If we won we won, if we didn't that was it, we'd had a game.<sup>75</sup>

Cora's involvement began with her marriage in 1949, and the *Rugby Football League*

*Official Guide* listed her as club secretary for three seasons between 1951 and 1954. She recalled:

I started in 1949 and I finished in 1953 because I was pregnant. I was everything [i.e. her role was more than simply club secretary]. Thoroughly enjoyed it. Good set of lads. We had to beg borrow or steal for finances. We were poor. We had a dressing room, one room, no water, no heating, just one room for both teams. Nobody grumbled. They just got on with it, got changed. I don't think there were many hooks in the place. It belonged to Dewsbury Borough Council then. We were members of the Heavy Woollen District Amateur Rugby League [...] collections for new kit were taken from the spectators, not very many. I went to Leeds, sports shop at the bottom of Briggate, and we came to some agreement, so we had a new kit, which in those days were very, very heavy cotton, and it was my job to wash them and dry them and sew them. However we got through.<sup>76</sup>

The communal experience of working at the club comes through strongly in Cora's

testimony. Her use of the personal pronoun "we" signifies that she considered the club a collective. Even when describing the work she put in with the kits, she sees this in terms of the "we" coping. Overthorpe belonged to the village, and the women rallied round, putting their domestic skills to the service of the club:

Half time drinks were supplied by a Mrs Secker who lived in the estate. If it was a very, very cold day it would be hot coffee with maybe a drop of rum in it. If it was a hot day it was cold drinks.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Cora Haley, *Early Days at Overthorpe Rangers* [Recorded Interview] n.d.: Available: <http://www.rugbyleagueoralhistory.co.uk/audios/find/22> [Accessed 03 July 2016].

<sup>76</sup> Cora Haley, *Early Days at Overthorpe Rangers* [Recorded Interview] n.d.: Available: <http://www.rugbyleagueoralhistory.co.uk/audios/find/22> [Accessed 03 July 2016].

<sup>77</sup> Cora Haley, *Early Days at Overthorpe Rangers* [Recorded Interview] n.d.: Available: <http://www.rugbyleagueoralhistory.co.uk/audios/find/22> [Accessed 03 July 2016].



**Figure 32:** Cora Haley.<sup>78</sup>

The examples of Rose Kyle and Cora Haley reflect Claire Langhamer's assertion of 'the significance of life-cycle stage in actively structuring the leisure patterns of women from 1920 to 1960'.<sup>79</sup> Cora became involved in her adult life because of her husband's prior leisure choices, but her work at Overthorpe ceased when she entered a new life cycle and became pregnant. Rose, in her mid-thirties, had come through the most demanding time of her mothering cycle, which gave her the flexibility needed to volunteer for Liverpool Stanley. She engaged with the sport because of her teenage son, but as he was an older, only child, Rose did not have the same demands placed on her as there would have been in Jack's infancy, so she was able to "mother" the Huyton club, and by default the community, as part of her mothering of Jack. John Kyle too, entered the rugby world because of his son's interest, but his efforts were sublimated by Rose, who, as the chief organiser that set up the club, was the dominant actor. The

<sup>78</sup> Up and Under, *Cora Haley* [photograph] n.d. Available: <http://www.rugbyleagueoralhistory.co.uk/audios/find/22> [Accessed 03 July 2016].

<sup>79</sup> Claire Langhamer, *Women's Leisure in England*, p.49.



circumstances of these women, who were at different stages of their life, demonstrate how for many women their lives dictated and structured their leisure experiences.

### Supporters' Clubs: Liverpool Stanley

Whilst Rose was concentrating her efforts on the amateur game, several other Liverpool women were busying themselves in aid of the professional side, Liverpool Stanley. Rugby League had continued during World War Two, albeit with fewer teams, with the organisation of a Wartime Emergency League, and full rugby resumed with the 1945-46 season. In July 1945, the Liverpool Stanley Supporters' Club called for 'supporters old and new' to attend a general meeting and help ready the club for the season ahead, whilst the parent club advertised for players.<sup>80</sup> The supporters' club had funds that had lain dormant during the war and only a month after they resumed activities they handed over £200 to support the club's efforts to resume competitive rugby.<sup>81</sup> The following season the supporters' club pledged to raise £1000 for Stanley, which their five-hundred-strong membership had achieved by March.<sup>82</sup> With a record seven-hundred-and-fifty membership in December 1947, the supporters' club were buoyant despite Stanley's lacklustre displays on the pitch, so much so that they pledged to raise £4000 during 1947-48.<sup>83</sup> Indeed, it was the supporters' club that kept the club going throughout the latter part of the decade; they even financed the club when its assets were frozen in the August of 1948.<sup>84</sup> Two years after Rose had fashioned the club's kit, the supporters' club made a

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<sup>80</sup> *Liverpool Echo*, 09 July, 1945, p.3; *Liverpool Echo*, 18 July, 1945, p.2.

<sup>81</sup> *Liverpool Echo*, 06 August, 1945, p.3.

<sup>82</sup> *Prescot and District Reporter*, 21 March, 1947, p.4.

<sup>83</sup> *Liverpool Echo*, 10 December, 1947, p.3.

<sup>84</sup> *Liverpool Echo*, 24 August, 1948, p.3; *Prescot and District Reporter*, 27 August, 1948, p.1.

gift of a brand new set for the 1948-49 season.<sup>85</sup> Clothes rationing remained in place until February 1949, when some items were lifted from the coupon exchange scheme, such as suits, coats and woollen dresses.<sup>86</sup> However, the twenty-five per cent tax placed on unrationed goods caused a problem for the working-class, with one local woman observing “we have enough coupons; what we want is the money”.<sup>87</sup> One woman arrived at a clothing store at 4:30am in time to be the first in the queue and take advantage of drastic reductions in its yearly clearance sale, having walked several miles due to the lack of public transport.<sup>88</sup> The cartoons below from the *Liverpool Echo*, show that clothes rationing was a problem rooted firmly in the woman’s domain, with the cartoonist depicting the gendered attitudes towards the issue.



**Figure 33:** A woman’s perspective on high clothing prices.<sup>89</sup>



**Figure 34:** A man’s perspective of the seeming irrationality of women over damaged clothing.<sup>90</sup>

<sup>85</sup> *Prescot and District Reporter*, 24 September, 1948, p.1; *Liverpool Echo*, 25 September, 1948, p.4.

<sup>86</sup> *Liverpool Echo*, 01 February, 1949, p.4.

<sup>87</sup> *Liverpool Echo*, 01 February, 1949, p.4.

<sup>88</sup> *Liverpool Echo*, 01 February, 1949, p.4.

<sup>89</sup> *Liverpool Echo*, 06 October, 1948, p.4.

<sup>90</sup> *Liverpool Echo*, 29 January, 1949, p.4.

The cartoon on the right, depicting two rugby players in torn kit, makes light of the effects of high prices and textile shortages by presenting a baffled, male view of a wife's complaint about a laddered stocking, whilst that on the left uses hyperbole to highlight the very real concerns of women.

When a new Liverpool Stanley kit was ordered for the 1949-50 season, the club were told that it would take nine months to be ready, so on November 1<sup>st</sup> the club turned to the women of the supporters' club for help, suggesting that they 'might help by making shirts and shorts'.<sup>91</sup> The following week, Mrs Gayter, who had been absent from the previous week's meeting when the suggestion had been made, promised new jerseys for the team by that very weekend's fixture versus Belle Vue.<sup>92</sup> She was true to her word and made the complete set in just three days, causing her to turn up to the match 'with her sore fingers bandaged'.<sup>93</sup> The *Liverpool Echo* reported that the shirts had only been finished at midnight and credited Mrs Gayter's husband with their creation, with the *Prescot and District Reporter* correctly identifying her as the maker four days later.<sup>94</sup> At the supporters' club meeting the following week, the following entry was made in the minute book:

Chairman expressed opinion that team had looked quite smart in their new kit and thanks due to Mr and Mrs Gayter. The one fault being that jerseys were a bit on the short side.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Minutes of the Liverpool Stanley Supporters' Club, Meeting 01 November, 1949. RFL Archive.

<sup>92</sup> Minutes of the Liverpool Stanley Supporters' Club, Meeting 08 November, 1949. RFL Archive.

<sup>93</sup> *Prescot and District Reporter*, 18 November, 1949, p.6.

<sup>94</sup> *Liverpool Echo*, 12 November, 1949, p.6; *Prescot and District Reporter*, 18 November, 1949, p.6.

<sup>95</sup> Minutes of the Liverpool Stanley Supporters' Club, Meeting 15 November, 1949. RFL Archive.

The record shows that Mrs Gayter was absent from this meeting due to illness, and one can only wonder whether this was down to the immense effort she put in to making the kit that resulted in her injured hands. The comment about the shortness of the jerseys, if this is reflective of the tone in which the message was conveyed, is decidedly unappreciative of her extreme efforts made on behalf of the club. The following week, at the meeting of November 22<sup>nd</sup>, Mrs Gayter was present when Mr Eymond, whose wife also served on the management committee, 'registered a protest re the seeming ingratitude of the Club Committee re the jerseys made by Mrs Gayter'. The jerseys that the club had previously ordered had arrived at the parent club, and he said that 'it seemed that Mrs Gayter's set of jerseys had been pushed into the background'.<sup>96</sup> During a general discussion about the matter, Mr Draper, an official at Liverpool Stanley, stated that 'he understood the set made by Mrs Gayter had been returned to her for lengthening'.<sup>97</sup> There is no mention of any response to this, but as Mrs Gayter was present one can assume that she replied. Neither Mrs Gayter nor Mrs Eymond remained voiceless on the committee, with both women's names appearing frequently in the minutes as they introduced and seconded proposals. It is also recorded that Mrs Gayter was not reticent in disagreeing with her husband's opinions, proposing an amendment to an idea that Mr Eymond had put forward and her husband had seconded, that of inviting several guest speakers to their next monthly meeting. Mrs Gayter, seemingly with her eye on the practicalities of the situation, 'moved an amendment that Mr Spalding be requested to leave over till a later date due to pressure of business'. Her amendment was carried by seven votes to two.<sup>98</sup> At the next meeting she was appointed to a small "advert

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<sup>96</sup> Minutes of the Liverpool Stanley Supporters' Club, Meeting 22 November, 1949. RFL Archive.

<sup>97</sup> Minutes of the Liverpool Stanley Supporters' Club, Meeting 22 November, 1949. RFL Archive.

<sup>98</sup> Minutes of the Liverpool Stanley Supporters' Club, Meeting 28 March, 1950. RFL Archive.

committee” with the intention of raising money for a ground fund.<sup>99</sup> Of the twenty-nine committee meetings that took place between 11<sup>th</sup> October, 1949 and 27<sup>th</sup> June, 1950, Mrs Eymond attended twenty-three and Mrs Gayter eighteen, demonstrating that both women were active on the committee.

The census of 1951 shows that in Liverpool women outnumbered men by 47,576, so perhaps therein lies one factor for the prominence of women in its local sport. The previous year Liverpool Stanley arranged for toilets to be built in the corners of its new ground at Knotty Ash, with one being reserved specifically for women.<sup>100</sup> The upkeep of the facilities were part of the duties given to Stanley’s player-coach Bill Riley, who had a chequered tenure at the club between June 1950 and April 1951. Amongst other missed obligations that contributed to his dismissal, the second point minuted reads: ‘the ladies’ lavatories were in a filthy state and although he was told about them he did nothing and they had to be emptied by a member of the club’.<sup>101</sup> No mention was made about the male facilities, which begs the question as to whether it was an avoidance rooted in gendered prejudice. However, the Liverpool club could not function without its female members’ financial donations and volunteer labour. The Knotty Ash ground required heavy expenditure in order to make it fit for purpose, and other than public conveniences ‘new permanent stands, dressing rooms and baths’ were all needed, placing a ‘heavy financial burden’ on the club.<sup>102</sup> The club set up a ground fund to help meet the cost and opened up its membership. In 1950, thirteen women, including Mrs Gayter, paid a

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<sup>99</sup> Minutes of the Liverpool Stanley Supporters’ Club, Meeting 11 April, 1950. RFL Archive.

<sup>100</sup> Minutes of Liverpool Stanley RLFC, 1950-51. Meeting 20 July, 1950. RFL Archive.

<sup>101</sup> Minutes of Liverpool Stanley RLFC, 1950-51. Meeting 30 April, 1951. RFL Archive.

<sup>102</sup> N.S. Lloyd, *Letter to Members* [Letter], 03 November, 1950. RFL Archive.

membership subscription of £2, with one, Mrs Wilkinson, paying £5, with the extra £3 being donated to the ground fund.<sup>103</sup> Eight of those women were already founder members of the club, having previously paid a £5 subscription. Founder and ordinary members were entitled to free entry to all home matches, plus a vote at members' meetings 'which could be used in the future running of the club'.<sup>104</sup> Moreover, any paying member was 'eligible for election to the new committee', meaning that women were, for the first time in the sport's history, permitted to serve on the management board of a rugby league club.<sup>105</sup>

The supporters' club also donated £362 7s 9d from its efforts in the seven months between February 1<sup>st</sup> and September 2<sup>nd</sup>, and the move to Knotty Ash brought the supporters' club an opportunity to provide some comfort for spectators in the form of a bus, which they converted into a refreshment bar where the women served tea.<sup>106</sup> Eddie Waring, by this time the game's leading journalist, took a trip to the ground that November and the resultant article in *Rugby League Review* 'delivered a scorching indictment on the club'.<sup>107</sup> He bemoaned the lack of seating, with journalists needing to sit on boxes and rest typewriters on tin cans. The visiting Whitehaven side 'stripped in a hut, but then went back to their coach to keep warm', whilst a club official and a director

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<sup>103</sup> Liverpool Stanley RLFC Ground Fund and Members' Club Account 1950: List of Subscribers. The women listed were: Mrs E.B. Wilkinson (Founder Member N<sup>o</sup> 8), Mrs Symes, (N<sup>o</sup> 29), Mrs L. Postlethwaite (N<sup>o</sup> 102), Mrs Gayter (N<sup>o</sup> 107), Mrs Metcalfe (N<sup>o</sup> 112), Mrs A.E. Gregson (N<sup>o</sup> 129), Mrs A. Houghton (N<sup>o</sup> 135), Mrs E.E. Tarland (N<sup>o</sup> 143), Mrs Wooley, Miss M. Wooley, Mrs R. Raine, Mrs Sowerby, Mrs. M.A. Nelson, Mrs M. Van Arundel.

<sup>104</sup> *Prescot and District Reporter*, 03 February, 1950, p.5.

<sup>105</sup> Minutes of the Liverpool Stanley Supporters' Club, Meeting 07 February, 1950. RFL Archive.

<sup>106</sup> Minutes of Liverpool Stanley RLFC, 1950-51. Meeting 17 July, 1950. RFL Archive; Mike Brocken, *Liverpool City RLFC: Rugby League in a Football City*, (London: London League Publications, 2008), p.82.

<sup>107</sup> Mike Brocken, *Liverpool City RLFC*, p.82.

set about selling raffle tickets. The club had written to all its members on November 3<sup>rd</sup>, asking them to sell five books of eleven tickets each for a Christmas Draw and raise funds for ground improvements.<sup>108</sup> Waring declared that Stanley had a “Cinderella complex” and felt that the ‘club directors should be out looking for players rather than selling raffle tickets’, but their involvement in the grass roots of the club can be seen as an embodiment of the community, collegial environment that kept the Liverpool club functioning under difficult circumstances.<sup>109</sup> In the six months from December 1951, twenty percent of the supporters’ club’s official lottery promoters were women, and several club officials were also listed.<sup>110</sup> Nevertheless, for Waring, Liverpool Stanley was a tired housewife, more concerned with womanly domestic chores and housekeeping than the manly public realm of player recruitment and promoting the club to a wider audience. What Waring failed to recognise was that it was the domestic efforts of the supporters and the directors, who all hailed from the same community that kept the club functioning at all. Liverpool Stanley was a club embedded in its community, which drew on the strengths of that community to serve its inhabitants. Waring’s attitude of the patriarchal club directors being set above the volunteer workers of the club’s membership and the supporters’ club, was now somewhat out of date, for the post-war period heralded a new era for rugby league that admitted greater supporter activity within its operations and gave the housewife greater public agency within the sport than ever before.

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<sup>108</sup> N.S. Lloyd, *Letter to Members* [Letter], 03 November, 1950. RFL Archive.

<sup>109</sup> Mike Brocken, *Liverpool City RLFC*, p.82.

<sup>110</sup> Liverpool City R.L.F. Supporters’ Club Private Lottery Tickets, December 1951 and June 1952. Women named are: Miss B. Williams, Mrs. Summerfield, Mrs. Davies, Mrs E. Gardner, Mrs Gray, Mrs Dearden, Mrs Fodsham, Miss Quine, Mrs E. Fitton, Mrs E. Dixon, Mrs Carson and Mrs P. Murtagh. In June 1952, of 66 promoters all women remained listed with the addition of Mrs Wright. Club officials listed include Mr Facey and Mr Draper.

## Conclusion

Langhamer has discussed the problematic nature of a definition of “leisure” that is in opposition to “work”, and this chapter has shown that for some women the boundary between work and leisure was not easily defined.<sup>111</sup> Much has been written about women being the ‘custodians of family pleasure’ and how women work to service the leisure time of their families.<sup>112</sup> Yet even in this framework, thought must be given to a woman’s place within the family. Is she *part* of the family, or *outside* it when it comes to leisure? An individualistic notion of leisure as ‘personal pleasure’ often ignores that both women and men, and their families, can experience leisure, and indeed pleasure, together; that leisure shared is not necessarily pleasure diminished.<sup>113</sup> If the post-war ‘advent of home- and couple-based leisure [...] demanded the creation of a comfortable site for leisure, through the application of domestic skills within the home’, does that negate the pleasure derived by women from leisure activities undertaken as a result?<sup>114</sup> Do the origins of the activity determine its categorisation; if an activity is carried out in response to another’s interest as opposed to being actively sought by the individual to service their personal interest, does that deem it work? In the case of the Kyle family, both parents “worked” for their son Jack’s leisure opportunities within rugby league. Rose applied both domestic skills and the secretarial skills of the workplace to facilitate her son. But her case shows that women were very much active in facilitating leisure within the community too. The formation of Huyton Juniors helped other teenagers play rugby, at the club itself but also at other clubs, as Huyton provided opposition against which to play. Huyton also became a breeding ground for talent available to Liverpool Stanley, another

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<sup>111</sup> Claire Langhamer, *Women’s Leisure in England*, p.137.

<sup>112</sup> Claire Langhamer, *Women’s Leisure in England*, p.138.

<sup>113</sup> Claire Langhamer, *Women’s Leisure in England*, p.138.

<sup>114</sup> Claire Langhamer, *Women’s Leisure in England*, p.140.



source of leisure for the community. Women contributed there too, via voluntary work and financial donations, and subsequently their aid contributed to facilitating rugby league as a whole, all the while providing a social arena for the women themselves. Yet however these women came to be involved, they *remained* involved, which begs the question, at what point does something that begins as “work” morph into “leisure”? As Langhamer suggests, leisure in adulthood was rooted in service and duty.

## Chapter Six: Domesticity, Community and Rugby League in the Post-War Years

In this chapter, against the backdrop of a paternalistic post-World War Two Britain putting family at the heart of the welfare state, personal letters sent between a rugby player and his wife will be used to demonstrate how domestic expectations rose in the period after World War Two. They will show a woman's entrepreneurial spirit in the absence of her husband provided for the family at a time when the Rugby Football League's mechanism of support was found to be lacking. The letters contain sexual expression, which is this chapter contextualises within the changing discourse about women's sexuality and companionate marriage and what it meant to be a wife.

The post-war decades saw home life become perceptibly more important to rugby players, and this chapter explores how wives took part in the rugby careers of their husbands and the extent to which family concerns came to the fore in player contract negotiations, with pragmatic women having agency to make or break a deal. The chapter also examines the effect upon a family of a fatal injury to a player and the response of the rugby league communities in aiding the family, whilst considering the smaller ways that a Cumbrian community in Workington rallied around those in need, before its women took to the field in a series of matches for the children of the poorest of the town, using the sport as a vehicle with which to consolidate the strong community spirit that acute poverty had bred amongst its people.

The fifteen years after the end of World War Two were ‘very much dominated by legacies of war’, with rationing and poor standards of housing stock affecting the population, and national debt and borrowing preoccupying the newly-elected Labour government.<sup>1</sup> The Beveridge Report of 1942 had identified the “‘five giants’” from which British society suffered: “‘want”, “sickness”, “squalor”, “ignorance”, and “idleness””.<sup>2</sup> The welfare state that was established in those six years of the Atlee government had five principal objectives, promising Britons a decent standard of living, protection against misfortunes such as illness and unemployment, prosperous family lives, that health and educational provision would become public services run by the state, and that public amenities, or the lack thereof, would be improved to the betterment of all.<sup>3</sup> And as the welfare state had family at its heart, so too did the British public, with Mass-Observation noting in 1942 that “‘the majority of people, men and women equally, consider[ed] their home of great importance, and many regard[ed] it as the centre of their life’”.<sup>4</sup> Thus it was that notions of modern domesticity pre-dated the war, but were only begun to be realised in the years following the war.<sup>5</sup>

The letters of Edna Jenkins and her professional rugby league player husband Dai Jenkins are a small example of the testimonies and oral histories of the immediate post-war period that tell stories of domestic expectations rising in line with wages. As the war

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<sup>1</sup> Arthur Marwick, *British Society Since 1945*, (London: Penguin [1982] 2003), p.xii.

<sup>2</sup> Arthur Marwick, *British Society*, p.28.

<sup>3</sup> Elizabeth Roberts, *Women and Families: An Oral History, 1940-1970*, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1995), pp.9-10.

<sup>4</sup> Quoted in Claire Langhamer, ‘The Meanings of Home in Postwar Britain’ in *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 40, № 2, 2005, p.343.

<sup>5</sup> Claire Langhamer, ‘The Meanings of Home’, p.342-343.

drew to a close the British government recognised the potential rugby league had to play a critical role in the post-war rebuilding of the imperial ties between Australia and Great Britain.<sup>6</sup> After the government guaranteed assistance for the journey, the Rugby Football League Council voted in favour of a tour during the summer of 1946. The touring team travelled to Australia's west coast on the H.M.S. Indomitable, and the name stuck as a moniker for the squad. One of the "Indomitables" was the Welsh-born scrum-half David "Dai" Jenkins. When thirty-two-year-old Dai set sail with his teammates he left behind his wife, Edna, and his four-year-old son, David, in their public house home, the sizeable Town Hall Tavern on Westgate, opposite Leeds' Town Hall, where they had been licensees for six years. The letters written between the couple allow the reader to gain a rare, singular insight into a rugby league player's marriage. Twelve letters exist in the collection; one written by Dai from France in 1938 before the couple were married, and the remainder were written between the period April and June, 1946. One of these was written by Dai with the remaining ten being in Edna's hand.

The first letter in the series was written by Dai from Fremantle, in the days after the squad's disembarkation. He told Edna of the 'devil of a mess' they had found themselves in; they were stranded in the port city whilst the officials arranged for them to take the two-thousand-mile journey to Sydney via train. Dai asked his wife's shoe size as they were 'the only thing that's not on coupons out here' and tells her to expect a basket of fruit by post. He tells her of a Welsh party he attended with four hundred Welsh

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<sup>6</sup> Tony Collins, *Rugby League in Twentieth Century Britain*, p.86.

people and how the friendly the local people are: 'people out here Ed, are a lot better than what they are at home', he remarked. But his frustration at the substandard arrangements made for their arrival lead him to bemoan, 'I am sorry I ever came on this trip, a trip of a lifetime they told us, [...] it will take a lifetime to get over it'. He asks his wife to send him some money and seeks reassurance of his affection returned, writing 'I am dying to see you both, are you missing me darling, I miss you and I love you'.<sup>7</sup>



**Figure 35:** Great Britain preparing for their 2,000 mile journey across Australia. Dai Jenkins can be seen second from the right.<sup>8</sup>

Edna's letters mixed personal and domestic news, anecdotes, dog tales, and business operations with lamentations about how long she has to wait for his return. In her first letter dated April 28<sup>th</sup>, she wrote with news of their friend's alcoholism, another friend's impending divorce and remarriage to another woman, and how their son wanted

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<sup>7</sup> Dai Jenkins, *Letter to Edna from Fremantle* [Letter], c.30 April-7 May, 1946, RFL Archives.

<sup>8</sup> *Great Britain Preparing to Board* [Photograph] 1946. RFL Archives.

her to buy him a donkey. In a wonderfully evocative and humorous line she wrote, 'I miss you! Hope you enjoy doing your own washing'. She was derisive about the Leeds club's attempts to raise money to support the touring players, reporting

They had a collection on Good Friday Leeds played Halifax. The amount they have between you is now £20. What a team you play for. Anyone would think they had collected a fortune. From what I can make of things this tour is going to cost a fortune instead of making one.<sup>9</sup>

The Jenkins family were fortunate, for they seemingly did not suffer as a result of the paltry efforts by Dai's home club to raise money for players' expenses. Edna was able to wire transfer money to Dai at his behest and reported that an attempt to collect a tax refund on his behalf failed as it required his signature, but expressed that it did not matter because 'we aren't in need of it'.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, she felt able to 'treat' herself to a 'quite cheap' summer dress costing £3 10s, and spent £10 on a new outfit for David to wear for Whit Sunday.<sup>11</sup> As we have seen, the Rugby Football league assumed a paternal role in the lives of players' families during a tour, making fiscal payments to them for the duration. However, Edna gave a sardonic account of the reality of a tour wife's situation that once again underlined the involuntarily precarious nature of the life of a rugby league player's wife:

Only received one months' money from [Leeds' secretary] Mr Ibbetson since you have gone. Poor thing he must be frightfully busy now the football season's over. Good job I have got the business or David and I would have starved.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Edna Jenkins, *Letter to Dai*, [Letter], 28 April, 1946, RFL Archives.

<sup>10</sup> Edna Jenkins, *Letter to Dai*, [Letter], 17 May, 1946, RFL Archives.

<sup>11</sup> Edna Jenkins, *Letter to Dai*, [Letter], 17 May, 1946; Edna Jenkins, *Letter to Dai*, [Letter], 12 June, 1946, RFL Archives.

<sup>12</sup> Edna Jenkins, *Letter to Dai*, [Letter], 02 June, 1946, RFL Archives.

In every letter Edna wrote about their business. The wartime ban on the import of barley and sugar for brewing made beer weaker in strength and limitations were placed on the amount of beer that could be produced, resulting in the closure of public houses for several days in the week. Despite high taxation, demand for alcoholic beverages remained high, and Edna gave a first-hand account of how 'most of the pubs around here are closed all the week, open only on a Friday, Sat [sic], Sunday'.<sup>13</sup> A week later she reported that they had taken 'between fifty and sixty pounds a night' and demand kept growing, for on June 3<sup>rd</sup> she wrote:

I wish if you could have seen the que [sic] outside here last night right the way up to Craven Davies corner. I opened at seven. We did £70 so you can imagine what it was like.<sup>14</sup>

An astute businesswomen, she informed her husband that due to twelve hours of celebration planned for V.E. Day she would close the pub for the whole week 'to save beer for V.E. and the Whitsun holidays. Ten barrels won't go far'.<sup>15</sup> This was a shrewd move, for on Victory Day the pub opened 'for two hours in the afternoon and from seven until nine at night' taking £113.<sup>16</sup> Edna recognised the success they have made of the business, but also the drawback of being tenant landlords: 'if this was our own pub we would be worth a fortune in no time'.<sup>17</sup> But like most working-class women, Edna relied on the support of her family to run her home and business. Her sister Betty helped her with the housework and the bar whilst her father ran the cellar and her mother shopped for provisions and looked after David.<sup>18</sup> Their presence was keenly felt when David

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<sup>13</sup> Edna Jenkins, *Letter to Dai*, [Letter], 17 May, 1946 RFL Archives.

<sup>14</sup> Edna Jenkins, *Letter to Dai*, [Letter], 03 June, 1946, RFL Archives.

<sup>15</sup> Edna Jenkins, *Letter to Dai*, [Letter], 24 May, 1946, RFL Archives.

<sup>16</sup> Edna Jenkins, *Letter to Dai*, [Letter], 13 June, 1946, RFL Archives.

<sup>17</sup> Edna Jenkins, *Letter to Dai*, [Letter], 24 June, 1946, RFL Archives.

<sup>18</sup> Edna Jenkins, *Letter to Dai*, [Letter], 24 June, 1946, RFL Archives.

contracted a heavy cold: 'thank goodness Mam, Dad and Bet are here or I don't know how I would have managed', she admitted.<sup>19</sup>

Nevertheless, the one thing that her family could not help Edna with was her feeling of loss at the absence of her husband. Her letters are strewn with affection for Dai and worry about his potential for injury. She reminded him to 'be on top form but take care of yourself Darling' and this request for his caution is a recurring theme throughout her correspondence.<sup>20</sup> She was no different to anyone else in Britain as she read about any knocks he received in the newspapers and it caused her a little anxiety when the printed reports contradicted each other.<sup>21</sup> The absence of a letter from him 'for nearly a fortnight' was felt acutely in light of her reading about his knee injury, and upon hearing rumours that he was going to sign for an Australian club.<sup>22</sup> Any pride Edna felt in her husband's achievements was drowned by fear, stoked by a lack of first-hand knowledge of her husband's condition, as exemplified in the following passage from June 22<sup>nd</sup>:

Darling, I am worried about you. In today's paper you were injured when the final whistle blew. But it didn't say what had happened to you. I hope to God you are alright. Last Wednesday's game headlines in the paper Dai Jenkins stakes claim for next Test. You must have played a smashing game. Dai, I shall be glad when you will be home again. I love you Darling and miss you terribly. The grounds must be so hard out there. I don't want to see you hurt. It is all in the game I know that. There has been so many injuries amongst you it frightens me. I am just afraid to pick the paper up incase [sic] I see your name staring at me. It is silly of me. But I love you and you are miles away God

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<sup>19</sup> Edna Jenkins, *Letter to Dai*, [Letter], 24 May, 1946, RFL Archives.

<sup>20</sup> Edna Jenkins, *Letter to Dai*, [Letter], 24 May, 1946; Edna Jenkins, *Letter to Dai*, [Letter], 05 June, 1946, RFL Archives.

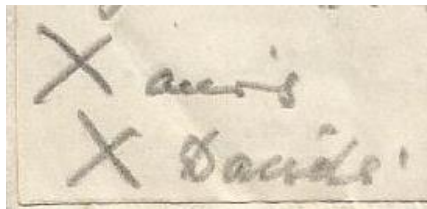
<sup>21</sup> Edna Jenkins, *Letter to Dai*, [Letter], 02 June, 1946, RFL Archives.

<sup>22</sup> Edna Jenkins, *Letter to Dai*, [Letter], 05 June, 1946, RFL Archives.



only knows I am waiting patiently for Sept. Take care of yourself  
dear.<sup>23</sup>

Only four days later, Edna was to read that her husband underwent an x-ray on his hand for a suspected broken bone and her anxiety began again.<sup>24</sup> And when, after playing rugby with some family friends, David told his mother that he was 'going to play football like his Daddy' she mourned for herself, remarking 'so that means you haven't caused me enough heartaches I shall have some with him too'.<sup>25</sup>



**Figure 36:** Dai's handwritten kisses.<sup>26</sup>



**Figure 37:** Edna's handwritten kisses.<sup>27</sup>

The letters also reveal much about the romantic and sexual side of the couple's marriage. Dai's letter is the first to display a habitual symbol of shared love between the family, in the designation of a kiss that is 'ours' and a kiss that is 'David's'.<sup>28</sup> Whilst there were always other kisses written in their letters, these two specifically designated marks appear in every letter from the 1946 tour. What this demarcation perhaps reflects, especially in the equal status given to both Dai and Edna in the use of the nominal possessive pronoun, is that which is abundantly clear from Edna's letters: that the nature of the couple's love for one another was markedly differentiated from the parental love of their child, in that it was one of reciprocal longing for physical, sexual expression of

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<sup>23</sup> Edna Jenkins, *Letter to Dai*, [Letter], 24 June, 1946, RFL Archives. Edna mis-dated this letter Saturday 26<sup>th</sup> June, but the postmark shows 24 June.

<sup>24</sup> Edna Jenkins, *Letter to Dai*, [Letter], 26 June, 1946, RFL Archives.

<sup>25</sup> Edna Jenkins, *Letter to Dai*, [Letter], 24 June, 1946, RFL Archives. Edna mis-dated this letter Saturday 26<sup>th</sup> June, but the postmark shows 24 June.

<sup>26</sup> Dai Jenkins, *Letter to Edna from Fremantle* [Letter], c.30 April-7 May, 1946, RFL Archives.

<sup>27</sup> Edna Jenkins, *Letter to Dai*, [Letter], 24 June, 1946.

<sup>28</sup> Dai Jenkins, *Letter to Edna from Fremantle* [Letter], c.30 April-7 May, 1946, RFL Archives.

their emotional connection. Her purchase of a new summer dress is framed in terms of sexual attraction:

I treated myself to a smashing blue frock ready for the summer [...] You will fall in love with me all over again when you see me dressed up in it. I have been tempted to wear that white nightdress but I will save it until the night you come home. Do you think I should need it? I don't.<sup>29</sup>

The thought of Dai seeing her in the new dress leads Edna to consider his absence from the bedroom and the assertion of the quick resumption of their sexual habits. She frequently declares that she is 'waiting patiently' for his return home, but her sexual desire for her husband, unfulfilled by his absence, suggests impatience. The occasion of his leaving was written with a subtext of sexual frustration:

One thing I hope we are closed the day after you come home. I don't think one of us will be fit to open up after sleeping together. There is one thing I am certain of, you aren't going to be drunk that night like the night before you went to Australia, too drunk for me to even snuggle up to you. What a memorable night to last six months.<sup>30</sup>

The inter-war period had heralded a wave of "marriage manuals" from sexologists that promoted sex as enlightened science and a necessary part of adult life for both sexes. Notable titles include Havelock Ellis' *The Erotic Rights of Women* (1917) and *The Play-Function of Sex* (1921), and Marie Stopes' *Married Love: A New Contribution to the Problem of Sex Difficulties*. Yet whilst there was a proliferation of heteronormative literature, 'the power and influence of [...] sexological writings in the pre-war years must not be over-emphasised; their impact on ideas about sexuality did not come into full

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<sup>29</sup> Edna Jenkins, *Letter to Dai*, [Letter], 17 May, 1946. Emphasis in original.

<sup>30</sup> Edna Jenkins, *Letter to Dai*, [Letter], 02 June, 1946.

effect until the 1920s and 1930s.’<sup>31</sup> Numerous social studies have shown that after World War Two the view that ‘companionate marriage was the modern form of marriage’ was widespread and moreover that this ideal underwent a ‘filtering down from the middle-class families to the working class’.<sup>32</sup> Edna’s letters to Dai, in which she expresses her emotional attachment alongside her sexual frustrations display the hallmarks of the sexual thinking developed by the sexologists. Furthermore, it illustrates the principle outlined by Edward Griffith in 1937, who described sex between married couples as

a creative impulse, [...] providing a means of mutual consolation and mental stimulus. Quite apart from any reproductive purpose, therefore, we see that its healthy performance is essential to two people who are in love with each other, and who desire a completely satisfactory life [...] for the couple who practise it [achieves] a happiness which is almost impossible to describe’.<sup>33</sup>

Edna makes it clear that her life without Dai in a physical sense has removed from her an essential component of her overall satisfaction and wellbeing. The very notion of what the noun “wife” signified at this time was distinct from the cultural connotations of the past:

the *ideal* of modern marriage as firmly rooted in sexual pleasure produced a discourse in which to identify as someone’s wife was to acknowledge a sexual relationship in a way that would have been unthinkable in the nineteenth century’.<sup>34</sup>

Edna, then, is the thoroughly modern wife of post-war Britain, who engages with her husband emotionally and sexually and not only acknowledges, but expresses in no uncertain terms the conjugal expectations she has of her husband because her, and their, happiness depended upon the mutual sexual expression of their emotional love.

Nonetheless, Edna expressed a little caution amongst her coital musings, as the letter of

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<sup>31</sup> Lucy Bland, *Banishing the Beast*, p.257.

<sup>32</sup> Jane Lewis, *Women in Britain Since 1945*, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd., 1992), p.47.

<sup>33</sup> Edward Fyfe Griffith, *Modern Marriage and Birth Control*, (London: Victor Gollancz, 1937), p.22.

<sup>34</sup> Judy Giles, *Women, Identity and Private Life*, p.123.

June 3<sup>rd</sup> betrays a fear of pregnancy that was ‘all-pervasive’ for women at this time, who had seen the detriment to their own mothers, or mothers in their community, of a large family.<sup>35</sup> ‘Roll on September’, she commands, ‘but you must have a good brake, as David doesn’t want a little sister’.<sup>36</sup> The use of “brake” is euphemistic and indicated that the couple’s form of contraception was the withdrawal method. Given that the couple had been married for seven years and had only one child is perhaps indicative of a well-practised “brake”. Edna hinted at the financial benefits of a small family after spending a not insubstantial £10 on David’s Whitsun clothes, remarking ‘good job we only have one not half a dozen’.<sup>37</sup> David remained the couple’s only child thereafter.

Young David’s aversion to a sister betrays something of the gendered social conventions of the time, as does David’s reactions as written by his mother. Interested in rugby, the family dog, Rex, and playing with a toy aeroplane, he displayed definite notions of society’s expectations of boys. He was also not frightened of remonstrating his mother when she got it “wrong”:

I bought him some red swade [sic] shoes exactly like yours. When I showed them to him he said Mammy you are silly only girls wear red shoes, boys don’t, my daddy will call me a sissie. There is nothing he can’t say. So the red shoes, he calls his working shoes.<sup>38</sup>

The boy was also affected by the absence of his father from his world:

David wants you to come home to go up Woodhouse Moor to fly his kite. He is too big to go out with ladies he isn’t a little girl, he

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<sup>35</sup> Judy Giles, *Women, Identity and Private Life*, p.126.

<sup>36</sup> Edna Jenkins, *Letter to Dai*, [Letter], 03 June, 1946.

<sup>37</sup> Edna Jenkins, *Letter to Dai*, [Letter], 12 June, 1946.

<sup>38</sup> Edna Jenkins, *Letter to Dai*, [Letter], 02 June, 1946.

is a big boy and going out with his daddy when he comes home.  
You will see a difference in him Dai.<sup>39</sup>

As in the game of rugby itself, even the young David Jenkins defined himself in opposition to notions of femininity.



**Figure 38:** Edna and Dai Jenkins<sup>40</sup>

## Domesticity

Oral histories of the 1950s tell stories of domestic expectations rising in line with wages.<sup>41</sup> The benefits of full employment, realised between 1945 and 1973, were particularly felt in the north of England, an antithesis to the acute suffering the region

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<sup>39</sup> Edna Jenkins, *Letter to Dai*, [Letter], 17 June, 1946.

<sup>40</sup> *Edna and Dai Jenkins* [Photograph], n.d., RFL Archives.

<sup>41</sup> Elizabeth Roberts, *Women and Families*, pp.11.

faced during the depression of the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>42</sup> Evolving definitions of modernity could be seen between generations, as household electricity and internal bathrooms became normalised in younger minds, to be replaced by fitted kitchens, labour-saving devices and television sets.<sup>43</sup> Yet for some, such as Annie Mann, wife of Liverpool City Rugby League Club chairman Tommy Mann, acquiring a labour-saving device actually created more work. One Christmas Day in the early 1950s, her husband gifted her a brand new washing machine. Liverpool City had played one game on Christmas Eve and had another game on Boxing Day, but only one set of jerseys. Tommy recalled the extra “gift” he thoughtfully gave to wife that Christmas:

“So I brought the jerseys caked in mud to my home, and Annie spent Christmas Day washing them. After every two jerseys we had to take a bucket of sand and dried mud out of the new machine”.<sup>44</sup>

Whilst domestic technology had the ‘potential for transforming both housework and women’s lives’, for Annie at least that transformation was not for the better.<sup>45</sup>

Home life away from rugby league was demonstrably becoming more important for players. It was common for clubs to own houses and use them to tempt potential signings into a contract, but in 1950, Wigan’s Tommy Bradshaw did not want to give up the house on his eventual retirement and negotiated the buying of his house from the club with the money raised during his benefit season.<sup>46</sup> Family life also began to take

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<sup>42</sup> Pat Thane, ‘Family Life and “Normality” in Postwar British Culture in *Life After Death: Approaches to a Cultural and Social History of Europe During the 1940s and 1950s*, (eds.) Richard Bessel and Dirk Schumann, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p.199.

<sup>43</sup> Elizabeth Roberts, *Women and Families*, pp.11.

<sup>44</sup> *News Chronicle*, 08 November, 1957, page unknown. Tom Webb Liverpool City Scrapbook, RFL Archives.

<sup>45</sup> Elizabeth Roberts, *Women and Families*, pp.29.

<sup>46</sup> *Liverpool Echo*, 09 November, 1950, p.3.

priority in other ways. In a reverse of previous examples of men getting married then rushing to play in a match, some players opted to take a day off, such as Leeds' Dicky Williams, who was absent from a game against Batley in January 1953 in order to marry Peggy Knowles.<sup>47</sup> Just a week later, Rochdale's Bab Dagnall was granted a day off and missed his team's fixture against Whitehaven for his own 21<sup>st</sup> birthday party, and that Christmas, Barrow's Frank Castle gained leave of absence in order to spend his first Christmas for many years with his family in hometown Coventry.<sup>48</sup> Wives, who as we have seen played a central role in a player's career, were also prioritised in cases of their own ill-health. Russell Burn, of Swinton, missed a game versus Huddersfield in order to rush to his wife's bedside in South Wales.<sup>49</sup> Barrow's Willie Horne, at this time the Great Britain captain, refused to participate in the inaugural Rugby World Cup of 1954 due to wife Bessie's ill health, telling a pleading Bill Fallowfield that "'there is little chance of my going on the trip'".<sup>50</sup> Great Britain defeated host nation France 12–16 in the final, and Willie missed out on being the first to lift the trophy and be presented with the first Rugby World Cup winner's medal.

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<sup>47</sup> Cutting dated 19 January, 1953. R1 Scrapbook 6/9/52-27/3/53. RFL Archives

<sup>48</sup> Cutting dated 27 January, 1953. R1 Scrapbook 6/9/52-27/3/53; Cutting dated 23 December, 1953. R3 Scrapbook 10/12/53-23/4/54. RFL Archives.

<sup>49</sup> Cutting dated 28 December, 1953. R3 Scrapbook 10/12/53-23/4/54. RFL Archives

<sup>50</sup> Allan Cave, 'Willie – or will he not?', c.30 September, 1954. Unknown cutting from RFL collated press cuttings.



**Figure 39:** Bessie Horne collecting her late husband's Rugby League Hall of Fame medal in 2014.<sup>51</sup>

For some single players, tours offered them a chance to meet a potential future wife. *Australian Magazine*, a “sophisticated” monthly pictorial featured George Crawford’s ‘inside story’ of the Great Britain squad’s time in Australia. When Great Britain stayed overnight in in one place, custom dictated that the host town would put on an official dinner, dance, or ball, in the team’s honour. However, Crawford documented that there was some discontent amongst the squad:

At some of these dances the Englishmen felt they were there merely as showpieces. On occasion I heard them complain that the company available for them was restricted. The other guests were either married or attached, they would say.<sup>52</sup>

As yet there is no evidence to suggest that any Australian woman had ever moved from the southern hemisphere to marry a British player but family considerations became an important part of the negotiations between British clubs and Australian players who they hoped to sign. In 1954 Ron Stanford wanted Rochdale to re-sign him for £1500 and pay

<sup>51</sup> Image: *Bessie Horne*, RFL Archive.

<sup>52</sup> George Crawford, ‘Inside Story on the English League Team’ in *A.M.*, 07 September, 1954, p.15.



the passage from Australia for him, his wife and two children. When the club refused to agree his terms, Halifax stepped in and agreed to pay his demands and he and his family moved to West Yorkshire.<sup>53</sup>

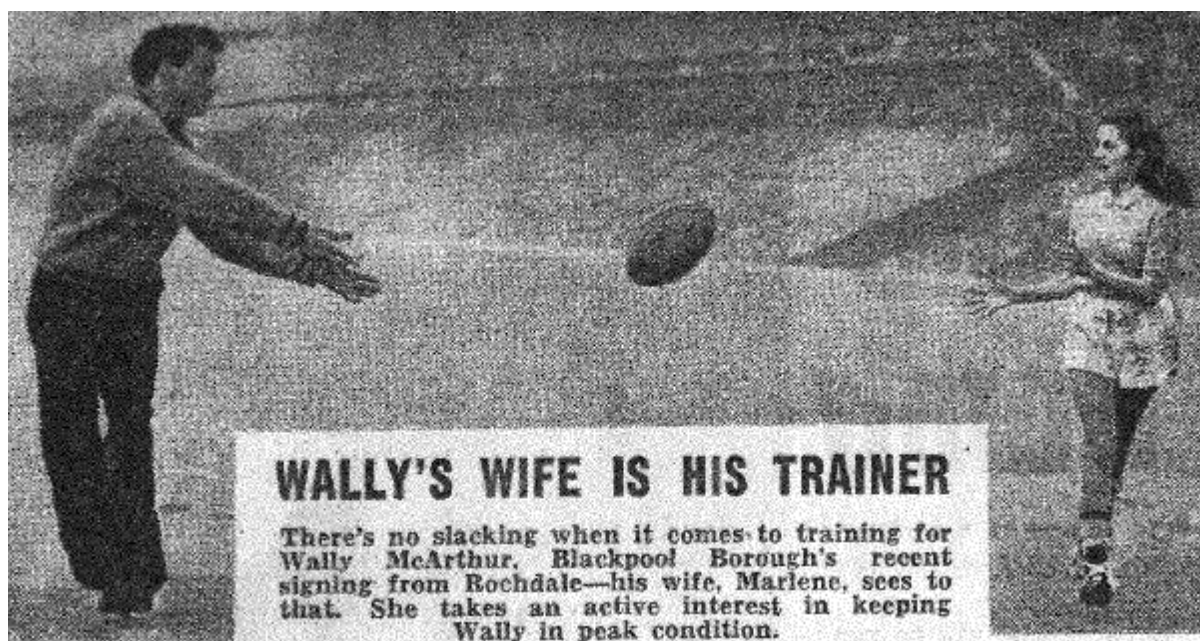


Figure 40: Wally and Marlene McArthur, training.<sup>54</sup>

This was one more example of the post-war years' growing awareness of domesticity and the importance of family lives for rugby league players. The idea of companionate marriage become increasingly apparent in players' on-field activities. The wife of Hull's international hooker Tommy Harris compiled the statistics of his scrum wins and losses during matches and Marlene McArthur, wife of Australian Aboriginal winger Wally McArthur, who now played for Rochdale Hornets, was photographed training with him, a sight that would have been unthinkable a decade previously.<sup>55</sup> Most prominently, players' concerns for the future of their wives and families were extensively reported in

<sup>53</sup> Cutting dated 06 February, 1954. R3 Scrapbook 10/12/53-23/4/54. RFL Archives.

<sup>54</sup> *Daily Dispatch*, 19 February, 1955, page unknown. RFL collated press cuttings, RFL Archives.

<sup>55</sup> Cutting dated 19 March, 1954. R3 Scrapbook 10/12/53-23/4/54; *Daily Dispatch*, 19 February, 1955, page unknown. RFL collated press cuttings, RFL Archives.

the press and wives' concerns were sometimes more than just having a nice home to live in for the duration of their husband's contract. When Brian Hanley signed for Whitehaven in 1958 both he and the club were active in looking for a business for his wife to run.<sup>56</sup> Clubs accepted that provision had to be made for wives of players they signed from outside the immediate area, but as in the case of Salford's attempt to re-sign the Cumberland captain Syd Lowdon in 1958, they were limited as to what they could do. Salford had signed Lowdon from Whitehaven for £5000, but had repeatedly struggled to find a Lowdon suitable employment in the area. Resultantly Lowdon applied for a job at Calder Hall atomic power station, Sellafield, which had opened two years previously and was the UK's first nuclear power plant.<sup>57</sup> He had married his wife Marjorie in 1957 and she was pregnant with their first child at the time of his application to Calder Hall. "Lowdon wants greater security for his wife and family, and we are trying to help', Salford coach Gus Risman told the press, 'but I want to stress this... *He can't expect preferential treatment. He is here on the same basis as any other Salford player*'".<sup>58</sup>

Some wives were quite clearly directly involved in the decision-making process when a player was considering transferring to another club. It was Ralph Ormondroyd's wife Muriel who persuaded him to move from Hunslet to Dewsbury when he 'couldn't get a regular place at Hunslet', a move which 'paid dividends for both Ralph and Dewsbury'.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Cutting dated 12 July, 1958. R10 Scrapbook 16/4/58-23/01/59. RFL Archives.

<sup>57</sup> Cutting dated 17 September, 1958. R10 Scrapbook 16/4/58-23/01/59. RFL Archives; Paul Brown, 'First nuclear power plant to close' in *The Guardian*, 21 March 2003. Available: <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2003/mar/21/nuclear.world> [Accessed: 27 April 2016].

<sup>58</sup> Cutting dated 17 September, 1958. R10 Scrapbook 16/4/58-23/01/59. RFL Archives. Emphasis in original.

<sup>59</sup> Cutting dated 06 February, 1954. R3 Scrapbook 10/12/53-23/4/54. RFL Archives.

For some players, it was their wife that had the final say on how their career progressed. Oldham had spent two years trying to acquire the signature of Great Britain's wing threequarter Ike Southward from Workington when the club finally succeeded in March 1959, for a world-record transfer fee of £10,650. Betty Southward did not want 'to leave her friends at Workington', but after being persuaded to travel to Oldham and inspect a £2,000 bungalow that the club was offering to the couple, she relented and the deal was made. But whilst her husband remained stunned at becoming the world's most expensive player – *"I don't know what to say. I never thought I could ever be worth so much money – I am just amazed"* – his wife took a much more pragmatic view:

"This has been such a hectic day that I just want to go to bed and rest. The £600 that we get as a result of the deal will be put in the bank – footballing does not go on for ever. *If that bungalow which Oldham are giving us had not been up to my standards, I would certainly have refused to move and the deal would have been off*".<sup>60</sup>

Club officials were well aware of the power of wives when it came to their husband's rugby careers; Dai Rees, the Bradford coach, highlighted the importance of marriage when it came to persuading Welsh players to abandon amateur rugby union and move north to play rugby league professionally when he told the press that there was more chance of players switching to league if they were thinking of getting married.<sup>61</sup> By 1959, the Leeds match day programme was listing the marital status of the players of the touring Australian national side in their pen-portraits of the tourists. The growing influence of wives over their husband's playing careers was reflected in this cartoon from

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<sup>60</sup> All information and quotations from: Cutting dated 10 March, 1959. R11 Scrapbook 24/01/59-09/11/59. RFL Archives. All emphasis in original.

<sup>61</sup> *Daily Mirror*, 04 February, 1954, p.13.

the *Liverpool Echo* in 1950, which anticipated the phenomenon that was the *Daily Mirror*'s misogynist Andy Capp cartoon, which first appeared in 1957:



**Figure 41:** A rugby player “ties a knot” so as not to forget his wife’s instructions.<sup>62</sup>

## Ralph Slater

On Saturday, 24<sup>th</sup> October, 1953, the domestic circumstances of one rugby league wife underwent a cataclysmic change. At six o’clock that afternoon, she discovered that her husband had been taken to Rochdale Infirmary having ‘been injured in a tackle in the closing minutes’ of a match between Rochdale and Oldham’s reserve sides. Slater, who played for Rochdale, was involved in a head-on collision with Oldham’s Stanley Piggott that dislocated his spine. Mrs Slater went to her husband’s bedside, where he told her what had happened. She left Ralph at eight o’clock and later returned, staying with him until his death, ‘caused by failure of respiration and circulation due to the fracture’, at six

<sup>62</sup> *Liverpool Echo*, 21 January, 1950, p.4.

o'clock the following evening. After hearing several witness testimonies, the coroner recorded a verdict of accidental death. The club rendered immediate financial assistance to Mrs Slater and her young child, aged five, and the Rochdale secretary sent a circular to all clubs informing them that a fund had been opened to provide assistance for them both.<sup>63</sup> Clubs immediately arranged collections and sent donations, and on October 31<sup>st</sup> there was a 'record response' at Rochdale's Athletic Grounds, when the collection amounted to £127.<sup>64</sup> The Rochdale players voted to donate '£1 from their pay, plus any winning bonuses' from four matches to the fund, and many donations came in from local clubs and public houses.<sup>65</sup> In the four weeks after Ralph Slater's death, the fund had raised £600.<sup>66</sup> The fund broke the £1000 barrier with the donation of £100 5s 8d from Leigh Supporters' Club presented on 19<sup>th</sup> December. Amounts were still being received in March 1954, and by the fund's closure that April it totalled £1,840.<sup>67</sup> What Mrs Slater did with the money raised cannot be ascertained, but given that 'between 1951 and 1957 the average house price hovered at just above £2,000', there was certainly much scope to create a solid financial future for both her and their child.<sup>68</sup> Curiously, she was not the only person to "benefit" from the fund. During the weekend of 11-12<sup>th</sup> July 1954, it was announced that a warrant had been issued for the arrest of Edmund Wilson, the Rochdale Hornets' secretary, who had been absent from his address since 7<sup>th</sup> June. The administration of such a great sum of money had perhaps been too tempting an opportunity for the twenty-six-year-old, who was suspected of:

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<sup>63</sup> All quotations from: Cutting dated 30 October, 1953. R2 Scrapbook 28/03/1953-09/12/1953. RFL Archives.

<sup>64</sup> Cutting dated 06 November, 1953; Cutting dated 07 November, 1953. R2 Scrapbook 28/03/1953-09/12/1953. RFL Archives.

<sup>65</sup> Cuttings dated 10 November, 1953; Cutting dated 17 November, 1953. R2 Scrapbook 28/03/1953-09/12/1953. RFL Archives.

<sup>66</sup> Cutting dated 21 November, 1953. R2 Scrapbook 28/03/1953-09/12/1953. RFL Archives.

<sup>67</sup> Cutting dated 12 March, 1954. R3 Scrapbook 10/12/53-23/4/54.

<sup>68</sup> Martin Cohen, *The Eclipse of 'Elegant Economy': The Impact of the Second World War on Attitudes to Personal Finance in Britain*, (Abingdon: Routledge, {2012} 2016), p.195

fraudulent conversion to his own use and benefit certain property, that is to say, the sum of £126, received by him for and on account of the Ralph Staler Testimonial Fund.<sup>69</sup>

Whether Edmund Wilson or the missing money was ever recovered remains a mystery yet to be solved.

## Cumbria

For rugby league, the post-war period offered an opportunity for growth. Since 1921 the Rugby Football League Council had discussed the expansion of its geographic reach and when a confederation from Workington successfully applied to the Council for membership in 1945, the sport claimed its first professional side in the county of Cumberland.<sup>70</sup> The area had a strong history of amateur rugby league stretching back to the formation of the Northern Union, but the admittance of Workington Town into the league began a new era in the sport's history, and Whitehaven RLFC soon followed, being granted entry in 1948. The expansion of the game into the county reflected an undertone of positivity that was rippling through the county and the nation. In terms of employment, the area found itself on 'a threshold of a new age', as construction work for new nuclear facilities began at Sellafield in 1947.<sup>71</sup> Complete with a one-hundred-and-twenty-five metre high chimney, which would tower over the landscape as a sign of local, national, and technical advancement, the new manufactory promised skilled, well-paid jobs to local men.<sup>72</sup> The long-established coal-mining industry, riven with industrial stoppages in the

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<sup>69</sup> *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, 12 July, 1954, p.1.

<sup>70</sup> Tony Collins, *Rugby League in Twentieth Century Britain*, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006), p.65-66.

<sup>71</sup> C. N. Hill, *An Atomic Empire: A Technical History of the Rise and Fall of the British Atomic Energy Programme*, (London: Imperial College Press, 2013), p.178; Sellafield Ltd., *Windscale*. Available: <http://www.sellafieldsites.com/solution/risk-hazard-reduction/windscale/> [Accessed: 12 March, 2017].

<sup>72</sup> 'Windscale Pile Chimney: Removing an Icon' in *Sellafield Magazine*, 09 January, 2017. Available: <http://www.sellafieldmagazine.com/windscale-pile-chimney-removing-icon/> [Accessed: 12 March, 2017].

inter-war years, entered an era of relative calm as 'the number of strikes in Cumberland started to decline in late 1945'.<sup>73</sup>

The two towns of Workington and Whitehaven got behind their representative sides, and the spirit of local rivalry that can unite and divide families remains to this day. Women were ever-present at both teams' matches, and like northern women of previous generations they were active in making their opinions known. Mrs E. Tomlinson of Workington had been watching Albert Pepperell play for four seasons when she wrote to *Rugby League Review* in March 1950 to disagree with an editorial piece that was disdainful of his selection for the 1950 tour of Australia.<sup>74</sup> The editorial suggested that, when it came to Pepperell, 'the selectors should have picked a man [based] on his weekly displays' and Mrs Tomlinson was adamant that

this is exactly what they have done in this case [...] He has twice sustained a broken jaw against St Helens and Keighley, and both times remained on the field until the final whistle. If that isn't pluck and guts, I don't know what is. [...] it is unwise to select men on the playing of one game – it is the consistent who are the most valuable. I can assure readers A. Pepperell is such a player.<sup>75</sup>

Over at Whitehaven, the ladies' section of the supporters' club busied themselves making the facilities fit for the modern era, their first aim being 'to provide modern conveniences'.<sup>76</sup> Gus Risman, an experienced international threequarter of high acclaim, joined Workington Town as their player-coach in 1946. He remembered fondly

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<sup>73</sup> Keith Gildart, 'Coal Strikes on the Home Front: Miners' Militancy and Socialist Politics in the Second World War' in *Twentieth Century British History*, Vol. 20, No 2, 2009, p.150.

<sup>74</sup> *Rugby League Review*, Vol. 4, No 74, 24 March, 1950, pp.8 and 12.

<sup>75</sup> *Rugby League Review*, Vol. 4, No 74, 24 March, 1950, pp.8 and 12.

<sup>76</sup> *Rugby League Review*, Vol. 5, No 97, 01 September, 1950. p.8.

the way the women rallied round. They came to the matches with the men, and Workington soon became the family team. Certainly no club could have wished for more wonderful support from the ladies, God bless 'em!<sup>77</sup>

Workington Town were quick to win honours. They lifted the Championship Trophy in 1951, and beat Featherstone Rovers 18-10 at Wembley to win the Challenge Cup final the following season. Whilst thousands flocked to the capital, for one supporter the journey was impossible, but between the supporters' club and the Workington players it was a time neither he, nor Gus, would never forget:

on the way [back] to Workington we paid one call every player was proud to make. We moved away from the streamers and the banners which lined our route and stopped at the house of a boy who had been crippled from birth. He could only see people through a mirror at the side of the bed in which he had to spend his whole life. But, despite his predicament, he was an ardent Workington supporter, and whenever we passed his house on the way to a game he would wave to us.

The Supporters' Association had bought him a television set prior to the Final so that he could see his favourite team in action, and we were only too glad to stop off and let him touch the Cup.<sup>78</sup>

This event demonstrates the scope of a supporters' club to reach out into the community through the medium of sport and improve lives, but it also hints at one aspect of post-war modernity that preoccupied the Rugby Football League for many decades: television. In 1951, of every fifteen households, only one household owned a television set.<sup>79</sup> Rugby Football League secretary Bill Fallowfield strongly disapproved of televised sport and believed it posed a threat to rugby league, as it would disincentivise people from attending matches, reducing gate receipts and revenue as people could opt to remain at

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<sup>77</sup> Gus Risan, *Rugby Renegade*, (London: Stanley Paul & Co, Ltd., 1958), p.71.

<sup>78</sup> Gus Risan, *Rugby Renegade*, (London: Stanley Paul & Co, Ltd., 1958), p.80.

<sup>79</sup> Elizabeth Roberts, *Women and Families: An Oral History*, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd., 1995), p.13.



home.<sup>80</sup> This inclination towards home-centred social activity would become a prominent feature towards the late 1950s, as more people acquired sets and watching television replaced traditional cinema-going.<sup>81</sup> Fallowfield branded it “ridiculous” that for £2 a year a TV viewer [could] see most of the sporting events in the country’ and said that the licence fee should be much higher.<sup>82</sup> Thus, the Rugby Football League, in 1953, refused to give broadcast rights to the BBC, after the televised 1952 final showed a marked drop in attendance, down 22,000 on the previous, untelevised year.<sup>83</sup> But after the war, ‘television was increasingly situated at the centre of domestic leisure time for women and for the family more broadly’ and opened up the potential for more women viewers of the game in the future. Television also would allow those existing women spectators who had reached the stages of their life cycle that denied them opportunity to attend matches to remain connected to the game.<sup>84</sup>

### **Blondes, Brunettes, Hornets and Amazons**

Far from the Victorian notion of the football codes as unsuitable viewing for “proper” young girls and women, there was a documented shift in the gendered attitude of sports spectatorship. Alongside chapters on beauty, the home and careers, Noel Streatfeild’s edited collection *The Years of Grace: A Book for Girls*, offered sections on leisure and sport. ‘We are all [...] a little sport-mad nowadays’, commented Denzil Batchelor in his chapter ‘Watching Sport with your Brother and his Friends’, which

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<sup>80</sup> Cutting dated 11 September, 1952. R1 Scrapbook 6/9/52-27/3/53. RFL Archives.

<sup>81</sup> Elizabeth Roberts, *Women and Families: An Oral History*, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd., 1995), p.15.

<sup>82</sup> Cutting dated 06 November, 1952. R1 Scrapbook 6/9/52-27/3/53. RFL Archives.

<sup>83</sup> Tony Collins, *Rugby League in Twentieth Century Britain*, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006), p.93.

<sup>84</sup> Helen Wheatley, ‘Television in the Ideal Home’ in *Television for Women: New Directions*, (eds.) Rachel Moseley, Helen Wheatley and Helen Wood, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017), p.209.

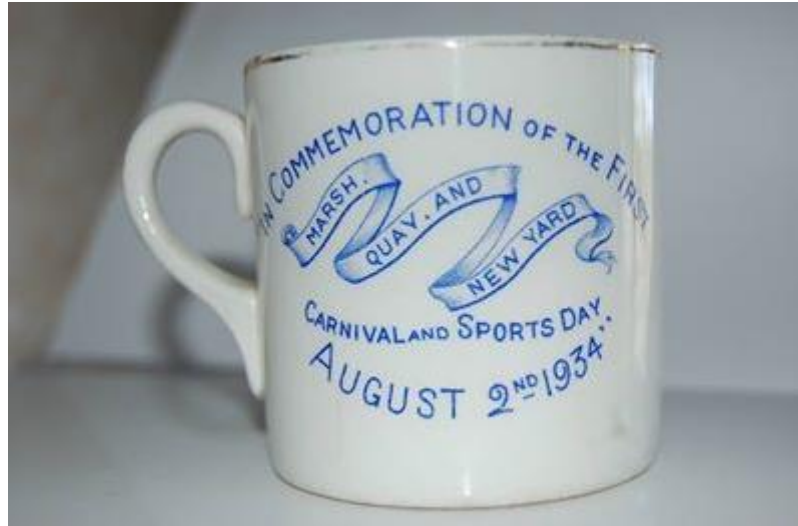
advocated that young girls should learn about sport and, if their brothers invited them to a match, put on their 'nicest hat' and 'join him without loss of time'.<sup>85</sup> Batchelor offered no advice regarding the playing of football or rugby, however, it was the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II in 1953, symbolic of Britain's post-war reassertion of traditional order, that would provoke a group of Workington women and teenage girls to break with tradition and enter the field for a series of rough but exciting games of rugby league.

Despite being one of the poorest areas of Workington, the Marsh and Quay district hosted the town's oldest carnival, an event of which the residents were immensely proud. Throughout the year they raised the money needed to pay for costumes, decorations for the floats, and prizes for the best entries. But the Queen's coronation was a special occasion, and the carnival committee decided to ensure that every child in the area was given a coronation plate, cup and saucer as a memento of the occasion.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Denzil Batchelor, 'Watching Sport with your Brother and his Friends' in *The Years of Grace: A Book for Girls*, (ed.) Noel Streatfield, (London: Evans Brothers Limited, 1950), p.280.

<sup>86</sup> Tom Whitehead, *Workington's Marsh and Quay* [Recorded Interview], 26 February, 2013; Alma Windley, *Workington's Marsh and Quay* [Recorded Interview], 26 February, 2013; June Light & Pat France, *Workington's Marsh and Quay* [Recorded Interview], 26 February, 2013.



**Figure 42:** Mug commemorating the first Marsh and Quay Carnival, 2<sup>nd</sup> August, 1934.<sup>87</sup>

The matches took place in the midst of a high point in rugby league for the town, which had celebrated their team's victories for two successive seasons. The instigator of the matches was Josephine 'Jossie' Whitehead. Alma Windley (née Wilson) recalled that it was Jossie's idea to raise funds by recruiting local women to play rugby league, which was perhaps unsurprising given that 'Jossie Whitehead was a fanatic, she went to [Workington] Town every week'.<sup>88</sup> The teams were given the names Marsh Blondes and Quay Brunettes, a gendered twist on the tradition of referring to sports teams by shirt colours such as "the reds" or "the blues", and played in two highly-contested matches. The games took place at Langton Park, the ground belonging to local amateur side Marsh Hornets, and the first occurred one weekday evening between 6<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> May. The *West Cumberland Times* reported that the players 'wore strips supplied by Gus Risman', but it was the success of the event that impressed the writer, who exclaimed 'they took over £100 at the gate! Oh,

<sup>87</sup> Victoria Dawson, *Marsh and Quay Carnival Mug* [Photograph]. The Helena Thompson Museum, Workington.

<sup>88</sup> Alma Windley, *Workington's Marsh and Quay* [Recorded Interview], 26 February, 2013.

what a grand time they can give the Marsh and Quay old people and children with that during Coronation Week'.<sup>89</sup>

The game was seen as a noble endeavour by the 'female gallants' to support their community, but in terms reminiscent of those applied in the 1920s, it was seen through the lens of novelty:

Humorous? Of course it was, very much so. At the same time, they played to the rules of the game, of course with instructions not to be "too vigorous with the tackling".<sup>90</sup>

The women's games took advantage of the "novelty factor" of women playing rugby, tapping into the wave of 'comic football' took place all over the region. Men played games in various states of fancy dress, 'willing to make themselves ridiculous in a good cause', leading some to believe that 'for entertainment and money-raising qualities [comic matches] sometimes beat the "real thing"'.<sup>91</sup> A second women's match took place on Saturday, May 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1953, again at Langton Park. Again billed as a 'ladies' comic rugby league match' the poster nevertheless reprimanded anyone who might scorn their efforts by informing them that 'these girls can play rugby as our first match proved to everyone'.<sup>92</sup>

Alma Windley played in the first of the two matches, aged only sixteen. She ran onto the pitch in a pair of borrowed boots, and met a 3,500-strong crowd. 'Everything was abuzz', she recalled.

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<sup>89</sup> *West Cumberland Times*, 11 April, 1953, p.7.

<sup>90</sup> *West Cumberland Times*, 11 April, 1953, p.7.

<sup>91</sup> All quotations from: *West Cumberland Times*, 18 April, 1953, p.9.

<sup>92</sup> *Marsh Blondes v Quay Brunettes* [Poster], 1953. Courtesy of Ronnie Jardine.

I think I was the littlest of the lot of them. It was near the end and I was kicked in a tackle and it cracked a bone in my elbow. They asked me if I wanted to go off, but I said “no, I’m alright”. I kept thinking to myself “I’m bloody not”! Afterwards my mother said, “fancy going on a do such as that”. It still aches at times.<sup>93</sup>

One other casualty that day was June Light (née Bell). June and her lifelong friend Pat France were Marsh Blondes and remember that none of the women held back, as the paper said they were supposedly instructed to do. Pat said

they were rough, honestly and truthfully. You played and you played hard, you played rough. There was no hold barred because you were a girl playing rugby, none whatsoever. You just got on with it, and if someone was in your way they got knocked out or pushed over or anything at all. There was no mollycoddling anybody [...] I can remember Betty McAllister was in bed for a week afterwards. I think I knocked her down.<sup>94</sup>

June agreed. ‘I got knocked out’, she said, ‘that’s why my mam wouldn’t let me play in the second game’. June’s mother, Ethel Bell, was also part of the team, but June’s injury meant that neither of them played in the second fixture.<sup>95</sup> At this time, playing rugby league would have presented the Marsh and Quay women with an unusual experience rough, person-to-person, physicality. Whilst boys and men had known this sort of brutal contact through the medium of the football codes and boxing, women had had no such outlet.

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<sup>93</sup> June Light & Pat France, *Workington’s Marsh and Quay* [Recorded Interview], 26 February, 2013.

<sup>94</sup> June Light & Pat France, *Workington’s Marsh and Quay* [Recorded Interview], 26 February, 2013.

<sup>95</sup> June Light & Pat France, *Workington’s Marsh and Quay* [Recorded Interview], 26 February, 2013.



**Figure 43:** June Bell and Pat France.<sup>96</sup>



**Figure 44:** Poster advertising the second Marsh Blondes versus Quay Brunettes match at Langton Park.<sup>97</sup>

The Marsh and Quay was a tight-knit community and for some the matches were a family affair. Quay Brunette Jean Matthews played alongside her mother, Florrie, and her aunt, Molly Short. Jean had grown up surrounded by rugby league, for her brother, Joe Matthews, played for Workington Town. Florrie followed Working Town home and away with her friends. 'It was the in thing on a Saturday, to go to a rugby match', Jean recollected. Jean herself watched family friend Johnny Lawrenson score two tries in the Challenge Cup final from her place in the Wembley stand. It was her mother, Florrie, who recruited Jean to the Quay Brunettes:

My mother and Mollie came in and said "we're going to go on a rugby team" and I said "I'll come on". I enjoyed it, I was a prop

<sup>96</sup> June Light, *June Bell and Pat France* [Photograph], 1953.

<sup>97</sup> *Marsh Blondes v Quay Brunettes* [Poster], 1953. Courtesy of Ronnie Jardine.

forward [laughs]. I remember I had a nail in my boot. I played with a nail in my boot, sticking in my foot.

Jean remembers that her father had no qualms about his wife and daughter playing rugby league, and that everyone in the community was supportive of the women's efforts.

We felt chuffed walking down in our shorts and our tops and football boots. We all had a good laugh, but once you got on the fields and were facing them... I think Marsh were a bit rougher than us, and I'm not saying that out of rivalry, there was a few tackles going in.

The only figure who was unsupportive of the women was one Eddie Waring, who, Jossie told the *West Cumberland Times and Star* in 1982, "awarded" the women the "'Brickbat of the Week" for attempting to play a man's game', a comment that betrayed Waring's gendered notion of the sport and complied with traditional reassertions of rugby league as an aggressive, inherently masculine, game.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> *West Cumberland Times and Star*, 02 October, p.18.





**Figure 45:** Marsh Blondes.

Back Row, L-R: Ronnie Jardine, Mary Dickinson, Margaret Jardine, Muriel Jardine, Bob Scott, Mabel Bell, Evelyn Wilson, George Herbert, Ethel Bell, Johnny McWalters.  
Front Row, L-R: Elsie Jardine, Jenny Jardine, Pat France, Jossie Whitehead, June Bell, Jean Dustin, Annie Little.<sup>99</sup>



**Figure 46:** Quay Brunettes

Back Row, L-R: Bob Scott, Kathleen Glover, Emily Galea, Ronnie Jardine, Betty Jones, Sally Thompson, Mary Galea, Molly McRea, George Herbert, Florrie Short, Alma Wilson, Johnny McWalters.  
Front Row, L-R: Francis McRea, Nelly Ray, Jean Thompson, Betty McAllister, Jean Matthews.<sup>100</sup>

<sup>99</sup> Tom Whitehead, *Marsh Blondes*, 1953 [Photograph].

<sup>100</sup> Tom Whitehead, *Quay Brunettes*, 1953 [Photograph].





**Figure 477:** Coronation Ware given to the children of the March and Quay, 1953.<sup>101</sup>

The games raised approximately £500 and every child on the Marsh and Quay received their coronation ware. Tom Whitehead kept his set throughout his life and can be seen in Figure 47. But Jossie, who played at scrum-half, did not rest once the carnival, and the coronation, was over. She arranged one final match for September, when the Marsh and Quay combined and adopted the name Marsh Hornets, and took on a team from Dearham village, six-and-a-half miles north of Workington, who called themselves the Dearham Amazons. Tom Whitehead remembers that Dearham was a village with a strong sporting culture and that several buses of men and women travelled from Dearham every match day to games at Workington Town. In the Marsh versus Dearham game, Jossie played against three sisters and two nieces who were in the Amazons' team. The photograph below (Figure 48) is the first known photograph to show women playing rugby league in Britain and was taken on Thursday, September 17<sup>th</sup>, 1953:

<sup>101</sup> Tom Whitehead, *Coronation Ware*, 1953 [Photograph].



**Figure 488:** Dearham score a try: front page photograph from the *Cumberland Evening Star*.<sup>102</sup>

According to George Plummer, the match was ‘a little departure’ from the usual rugby league fayre, and took place before a crowd of two thousand spectators. Dearham Amazons, who won the match 15-6, were presented with a trophy by the Mayor of Workington, Councillor Mrs Smith, and all of the players received a medal at a civic reception held in their honour.

Marsh Hornets were, according to reports, an inexperienced side, having only played ‘a couple of matches’.<sup>103</sup> Workington Town’s Albert Pepperell and Jackie Thomas

<sup>102</sup> ‘Dearham Score a Try’ in *Cumberland Evening Star*, 19 September, 1953, p.1.

were linesmen, whilst Australian centre Tony Paskins was drafted in as the referee, and it was reported that he was more than a little biased, seemingly even playing for the Hornets, something that caused him to be ‘mobbed’ by the Amazons.<sup>104</sup> In contrast Dearham apparently came with some notoriety, not only because the village had a reputation locally for sporting excellence, but because they had existed for several years, playing in an annual Carnival match. However, no further evidence has been found to corroborate this thus far.

Written reports of the match appeared in the local press over the following week, the tones of which are markedly different. The unknown writer of the ‘Rugby League Gossip’ column in the *Rochdale Observer* commented with a little frivolity that: ‘they say that Leigh and St. Helens are “rugby mad” towns but they’re much crazier in Workington [...] the women [...] not only watch the game but PLAY it’. The referee was deemed ‘lucky’ and the writer noted, in a comment that can be interpreted as an appearance-based insult, that ‘the teams were properly rigged out and some of the hefty forwards wore scrum-caps’.<sup>105</sup> Presumably such a precaution was the sensible option in the writer’s opinion, because he saw fit to remark that during ‘the battle [...] there was no scratching’ as if scratching was a given from women. “Elbra” of the *West Cumberland News* refused to take the game seriously. He scornfully wrote that the ‘hard training and practice they put in – once each year at the annual Carnival match’ made the difference between the two teams. Dearham, he mocked,

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<sup>103</sup> *Cumberland Evening Star*, 22 September, 1953, p.3.

<sup>104</sup> *Workington Times and Star*, 02 October, 1982, p.18; Cutting dated 03 October, 1953. R2 Scrapbook 28/03/1953-09/12/1953. RFL Archives.

<sup>105</sup> Cutting dated 03 October, 1953. R2 Scrapbook 28/03/1953-09/12/1953. RFL Archives. Emphasis in original.

started two annual practices ahead of the Workington girls, their captain having read a statement by Jim Sullivan three years ago to the effect that “it is training which counts”.<sup>106</sup>

George Plummer, writing in the *Cumberland Evening Star*, was more complimentary of the Dearham women. It is perhaps no coincidence, given that Plummer was at the centre of the Cumberland rugby league, being a member of the Cumberland Commission of the Rugby Football League in 1953 and having being made Secretary of the Commission in 1928. He wrote:

The game had not been long in progress when one could tell they had been training hard. They were far superior to the Marsh team in every part of the field. Why, on the right wing, in Doreen [Benn], they had a wing threequarter with speed and sidestep that would put many present wing threequarters in the shade.<sup>107</sup>

Plummer valued the effort the women put into their training and appreciated their “superior” play and especially that of Doreen Benn, who had talent enough to be singled out as being a match for her male counterparts.

For Elbra, this game was a match *for* those male counterparts, less about the women and more about the men. It was an ‘attack of shame, brought on by the women of Dearham’ with the intention of emasculating them publicly:

What a reflection on the menfolk is the fact that Dearham women have been the first to take football medals to the village for many a long day. With the men of the village suffering a

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<sup>106</sup> *West Cumberland News*, 26 September, 1953, p.8.

<sup>107</sup> *Cumberland Evening Star*, 22 September, 1953, p.3. Plummer incorrectly names Doreen Benn and Bell in his piece.

prolonged attack of chronic football inertia, whilst nearly a full team of Dearham lads travel out to play for other clubs, this feminine gesture from Dearham indicates what the womenfolk think about it.<sup>108</sup>

Ultimately, Elbra saw Dearham's win not as a positive reflection on the women themselves, or about female participation and enjoyment, but a "feminine gesture" about the ineptitude of the men of Dearham to get onto the field and represent the village. The women had taken the initiative and won, but any aptitude the women had displayed went unrecognised. His ridicule continued:

It can, as yet, neither be confirmed nor denied that Mr. Joe Tyson has called a special meeting of the Cumberland Rugby League to consider an application for League membership from Dearham Amazons, providing they can have Tony who shall also be the referee.<sup>109</sup>

Despite beating Hornets and Paskins, for Elbra, the superior Dearham team would still need to adopt the player-referee in order for them to possibly function in the male sphere of rugby league.

The significance of the women's matches can be gauged by the vivid memories of those who played in, or saw them, over sixty years later. Ronnie Jardine, who played on the wing for the Marsh Hornets' men's team, was a linesman for the Marsh and Quay games, and remembers the three matches clearly:

It was ding-dong, I can tell you. There were no half-measures. There were one or two bright sparks among them too; they had a winger at Dearham who was a livewire and Pat France was the star of the Marsh team. They would have a go at anything though,

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<sup>108</sup> *West Cumberland News*, 26 September, 1953, p.8.

<sup>109</sup> *West Cumberland News*, 26 September, 1953, p.8.

especially if it was for the kids. There was one woman, Jessie McRae, she was three months pregnant!<sup>110</sup>

Jessie Tolmie (née McRae) told the *West Cumberland Times and Star* in 1982 that she was five months pregnant with her son, Joe Tolmie, when she played, who became a 'well-known local sportsman', but whatever the term of the pregnancy Jessie was an example of how playing masculine sports during gestation did not diminish the physical ability of a woman to produce a healthy child.<sup>111</sup>



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<sup>110</sup> Ronnie Jardine, *Workington's Marsh and Quay* [Recorded Interview], 27 February, 2013.

<sup>111</sup> *West Cumberland Times and Star*, 02 October, p.18.



**Figure 499:** Marsh Hornets.

Back Row, L-R: Margaret Jardine, Elsie Jardine, Evelyn Wilson, Johnny McWalters, Florrie Short, Emily Galea, Kathleen Ferris. Front Row, L-R: Jenny Jardine, Jossie Whitehead, Jean Dustin, Pat France, Betty Friel, Jean Matthews.<sup>112</sup>



**Figure 50:** Dearham Amazons.

Back Row, L-R: Annie Pattinson, Betty Dixon, Madge Pattinson, Winnie Steele, Mary Falcon, Amy Allen. Front Row, L-R: Mary Dixon, Lillian Price, Stella Price, Lily Metcalf, Jenny “Jinny” McRae, Doreen Benn, Lucy Relph.<sup>113</sup>

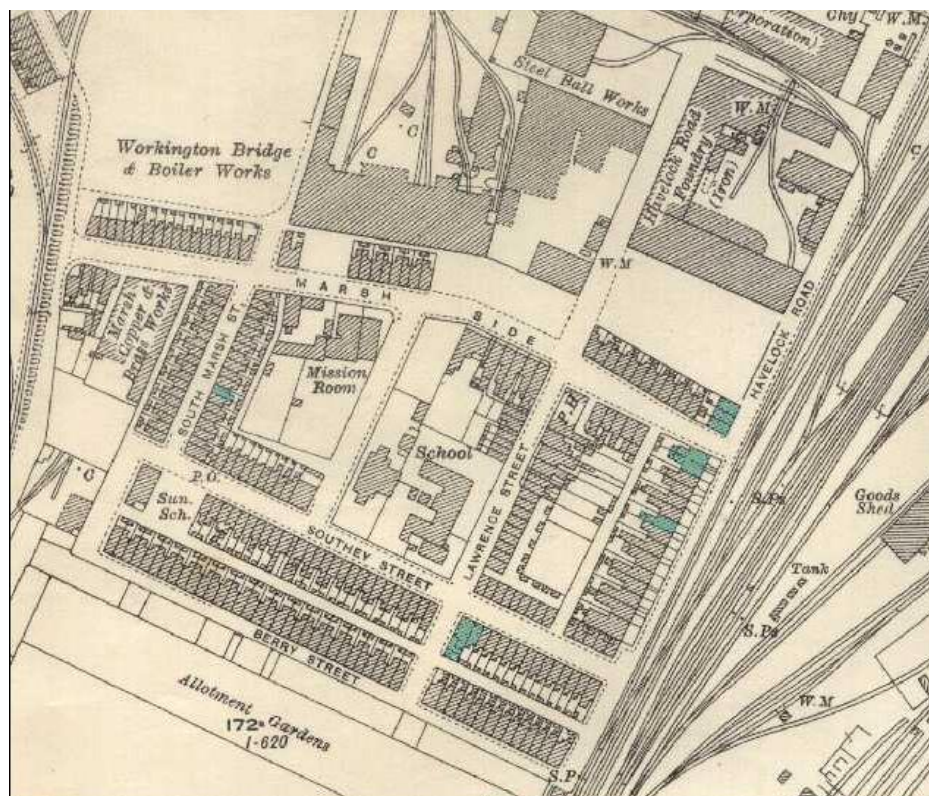
Hundreds of people used to live and work down on Workington’s Marsh and Quay in two flourishing communities. The shoreline area incorporated heavy engineering at Chapel Bank and a steelworks, alongside numerous pubs, shops, schools and working men’s clubs.<sup>114</sup> Despite its warm community, to outsiders the Marsh and Quay was an ‘undesirable place’ where rows of small, terraced houses shared toilets and had no

<sup>112</sup> Tom Whitehead, *Marsh Hornets*, 1953 [Photograph].

<sup>113</sup> Tom Whitehead, *Dearham Amazons*, 1953 [Photograph].

<sup>114</sup> BBC Cumbria, *Daffodil Tinted Spectacles*, 28 October, 2014. Available: [http://www.bbc.co.uk/cumbria/sense\\_of\\_place/prog\\_5a.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/cumbria/sense_of_place/prog_5a.shtml) [Accessed 04 July, 2016].

electricity.<sup>115</sup> As Claire Langhamer has noted, ‘even at the end of the 1950s significant sections of the British population remained excluded from the home-centred society’, and Workington’s Marsh and Quay housed such a population.<sup>116</sup> Yet everyone who grew up there remembers it with an air of nostalgia as a wonderful place, despite its poverty. Alma Windley described it as a ‘different place’ with its own unique character.<sup>117</sup> Alma Windley was deeply proud of being a ‘Marsh girl’; to the people, it mattered whether you were Marsh or Quay as it was your birth-right identity, passed down through the generations. But the classification did not make for an “us-and-them” attitude of rivalry, but of two separately identified peoples united as one: Marsh *and* Quay.



<sup>115</sup> Tom Whitehead, *Workington's Marsh and Quay* [Recorded Interview], 26 February, 2013; Alma Windley, *Workington's Marsh and Quay* [Recorded Interview], 26 February, 2013.

<sup>116</sup> Claire Langhamer, 'The Meanings of Home', p.343.

<sup>117</sup> Alma Windley, *Workington's Marsh and Quay* [Recorded Interview], 26 February, 2013.



**Figure 51:** Map of the Marsh side, 1926. The area remained relatively unchanged until its demolition in the 1980s.<sup>118</sup>

Tom Whitehead lived next-door-but-one to June Bell on the Marsh. In the 1950s, there was no electricity on the Marsh, but Tom's parents paid to have it installed in approximately 1953-54. Tom remembers the family going to his Aunty Jinny's house to watch the coronation, and recalled the irony of the lack of universal electricity in the only area of Workington that received an ITV reception in 1956.<sup>119</sup> The Marsh side comprised '216 homes' behind the steelworks, and was considered a little more 'upmarket' than the Quay, which had '300 houses [and] nine pubs'.<sup>120</sup> 'Across most of the country, slum clearance did not start before the mid-1950s', but it was not until 1965 that Workington Town Council decided the future of the Marsh and Quay, and it was 1969 before the Quay was compulsorily purchased.<sup>121</sup> Every interviewee regrets the eventual demolition of the Marsh and Quay. Tom said that residents did not recognise the poverty they were brought up in: 'you didn't think it was a slum, because that's what you were used to. We were happy'.<sup>122</sup> Like many others in "slum" areas, the social impact of the breaking up of the Marsh and Quay community was hard-felt, as residents were allocated social housing and relocated to other areas of Workington. Whilst modern houses made aspects of life more comfortable, the community that people had known was tangibly fragmented across the town. Yet for a while at least, the old Marsh and Quay spirit lives on in spirit,

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<sup>118</sup> Russell W. Barnes, *Map of the Marsh, 1926*. Available:

<http://www.users.globalnet.co.uk/~rwbarnes/workgton/marsh.htm#marshtop> [Accessed 04 July, 2016].

<sup>119</sup> Tom Whitehead, *Workington's Marsh and Quay* [Recorded Interview], 26 February, 2013.

<sup>120</sup> *Workington Times and Star*, 05 July, 2012. Available: <http://test.cnmedia.co.uk/remembering-days-of-the-marsh-and-quay-1.972536>

<sup>121</sup> David Kynaston, *Austerity Britain 1945-51*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2007), p.610;

Russell W. Barnes, *The Marsh*, n.d. Available:

<http://www.users.globalnet.co.uk/~rwbarnes/workgton/marsh.htm> [Accessed 04 July, 2016].

<sup>122</sup> Tom Whitehead, *Workington's Marsh and Quay* [Recorded Interview], 26 February, 2013.

through the oral testimonies of its former residents and in the regular reunions that take place at the Senhouse Street club.



**Figure 52:** Corner of Southey Street and Lawrence Street on the Marsh, prior to demolition.<sup>123</sup>



**Figure 53:** Awaiting clearance: South Marsh Street in the 1970s.<sup>124</sup>

## Conclusion

As Todd and Langhamer, amongst others, have emphasised, the decades after World War two brought increased domesticity to many British homes. In rugby league, this is exemplified in the increased influence of wives over their husbands' playing careers. The correspondence between Edna and Dai Jenkins is a small example that underlines the notion of companionate marriage that was becoming more prevalent throughout working class culture. Women's roles in society were beginning to change, and that a stalwart of rugby league like George Plummer appreciated the Workington women's matches as serious attempts to play the sport and was impressed by the skills

<sup>123</sup> Russell W. Barnes, *Corner of Southey Street and Lawrence Street* [Photograph]. Available: [http://www.users.globalnet.co.uk/~rwbarnes/workgton/marsh\\_/marsh3-.htm](http://www.users.globalnet.co.uk/~rwbarnes/workgton/marsh_/marsh3-.htm) [Accessed 04 July, 2016].

<sup>124</sup> Russell W. Barnes, *South Marsh Street*, [Photograph]. Available: [http://www.users.globalnet.co.uk/~rwbarnes/workgton/marsh\\_/marsh1-.htm](http://www.users.globalnet.co.uk/~rwbarnes/workgton/marsh_/marsh1-.htm) [Accessed 04 July, 2016].

on show demonstrated this change. The households on the Marsh and Quay may not have enjoyed the “luxuries” of the family-centred home, but their ways of life were strongly built around the family-centred community, within which rugby league played a significant part. The sport came to symbolise the industrial communities of the 1950s, where men remained dominant but women exerted amplified influence both in- and outside the home.

## Chapter Seven: Women Come Into Their Own

Whereas up to the 1940s women had predominantly been involved in rugby league as family members, such as wives and mothers, the 1950s brought change. The decade ushered in more opportunities to earn a living and support oneself as an independent single woman, and this independence was reflected in the way some women began to play roles in the sport independent of any familial influence. No accomplishments exemplified this more than those at Huddersfield, which will be examined in this chapter. Huddersfield itself was symbolic of rugby league's independent spirit, being the place where the game was founded. This chapter will make use of women's personal histories to explore the complex subtlety and tradition that women were expressing in asserting their right to determine how they would participate in their chosen sport, an insight that would not be possible without the diversification of the researcher from more traditional sources. This chapter also presents oral history evidence that provides testimony to women's growing personal agency, and explains how some pushed back against rugby league's patriarchal need to restrict female sexuality, defying male authority to invigorate the sport with fresh ideas and fervour. Nevertheless, it shall be shown that women's propensity for self-sacrifice in the service of others remained strong, and this allowed women to carve out their own social experiences.

The increasing sexualisation of women within the media and the traditions of beauty contests within industry and as tourist novelties provide context for the analysis of the Rugby League Queen competitions, which were run by the supporters' clubs and promoted an idealised version of feminine beauty and deportment. Rugby league

engaged in the capitalist exploitation of hyper-sexualised women during the 1970s and 1980s within its marketing strategy. It is argued that the wider backlash against second-wave feminism in the 1960s, which included the rise of “page three” can be seen here in microcosm as a backlash against the increasing agency of women within rugby league.

The final case study presented demonstrative of how women in rugby league benefitted from the evolving cultural perceptions of women that emerged in the 1960s and began to open up more opportunity to operate within rugby league. Yet despite the change, continuity did exist, and once again the life cycle of women is shown to be an impediment to their efforts, which remained defined by their relationships with men.

### The Fabulous Fartowners

Huddersfield Supporters’ Club claim to be the first Northern Union supporters’ club to exist, and whilst the rules drawn up in 1921 ostensibly did not preclude women from becoming members, it appears that there was an unwritten rule that kept them from taking positions within the committee. But whilst organised women’s sections were clearly a successful part of some supporters’ clubs, it was 1951 before the idea of a women’s section was broached by the Huddersfield committee, some twenty five years behind the likes of Halifax.<sup>1</sup> Prior to this, the only named “woman” to feature outside of the Fartown stands was Nellie Wagstaff, a doll-shaped mascot who was possibly the

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<sup>1</sup> *Fartown Supporters, Golden Jubilee, 1921-1971*, (ed.) Peter Crabtree, (Huddersfield: Huddersfield C. and A.C. Supporters’ Club, 1971), p.61.

inspiration for the female depiction of the Huddersfield club as seen through the eyes of the *Halifax Sports Courier* cartoonist.



**Figure 54:** 'Huddersfield's mascot, a little boy with a doll (Nellie Wagstaff) named after the famous captain'.<sup>2</sup>



**Figure 55:** Huddersfield Rugby League was depicted as a woman in the *Halifax Sports Courier* cartoons. Halifax RL were depicted as a black cat (Smut) and the Leeds RL representation could be interpreted as a Jewish caricature.<sup>3</sup>

Women had volunteered in the 'dry canteen' since the 1920s, and whilst the golden jubilee book marking the first fifty years of the supporters' club thanked them, no women were specifically named.<sup>4</sup> According to reports, 'hands and eyebrows were raised in horror among some officials' when the suggestion was eventually made that women be

<sup>2</sup> *All Sports Weekly*, 20 March, 1921, p.13. My thanks go to David Thorpe for bringing this to my attention.

<sup>3</sup> *Halifax Sports Courier and Guardian*, 10 October, 1925, p.3.

<sup>4</sup> *Fartown Supporters, Golden Jubilee, 1921-1971*, (ed.) Peter Crabtree, (Huddersfield: Huddersfield C. and A.C. Supporters' Club, 1971), p.17.

allowed to join the management committee in 1953.<sup>5</sup> Apparently, 'many felt they would be of no use in this hitherto masculine preserve'.<sup>6</sup> Despite such feeling it was May 31st when the Huddersfield supporters' club underwent something of a feminist revolution. Seven women were co-opted on to the existing Social Committee, Misses Elsie Shaw, Joyce Rushforth, Margaret Haigh, Nancy Beaumont, Miss O. Stocks, Mrs C. Jackson and Miss B. Brook. Nancy and Elsie were permitted to attend full committee meetings and were given the power to vote, a duty they took seriously as 'they only missed one meeting between them'.<sup>7</sup> The women impressed, and two years later, at the AGM of 1955, all seven were elected to the Supporters' Club Committee. Other women to join the ranks included Misses P. Dickinson, Miss M. Whitwam, Margaret Pilling and I. Gee.<sup>8</sup> This chapter will use the oral testimony of one of those women to demonstrate how, once the gender divide had been breached, the women of Huddersfield proved how wrong those early doubters were to underestimate the impact women could have on the Huddersfield club.

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<sup>5</sup> *Rugby League Magazine*, Vol. 2, Nº 20, December 1966, p.22.

<sup>6</sup> *Rugby League Magazine*, Vol. 2, Nº 20, December 1966, p.22.

<sup>7</sup> *Tom Webb's Rugby League Record*, Vol. 1, Nº 2, October 1962, p.5.

<sup>8</sup> *Tom Webb's Rugby League Record*, Vol. 1, Nº 2, October 1962, p.5.





Back row—Messrs. S. Garside, J. A. Brook (Hon. Treas.), B. Robinson, J. Stubbings, G. Hirst  
E. Starkey, W. Warburton, G. Doughty  
Middle Row—Messrs. C. Leake, W. Stoker, A. N. Gaulton, B. Taylor, J. Kilgannon  
W. Mosley, J. Webster, G. Bottomley  
Front row — Mr. S. Fletcher, Misses E. Shaw, J. Rushforth, M. Haigh, Mr. R. L. Hoyle  
(President), Misses N. Beaumont, O. Stocks, Mrs. C. Jackson, Miss B. Brook  
Mr. A. Lockwood. In front—Mr. P. Crabtree (Hon. Secretary)

**Figure 56:** Huddersfield C. & A. C. Supporters' Club Committee, 1956.<sup>9</sup>

Nancy Beaumont, born in January 1931 in the village of Golcar, just two-and-a-half miles west of Huddersfield, was the only child of parents who worked in the local textiles industry; her mother was a weaver and her father a cloth finisher. After primary school, she won a place at Royds Hall Grammar School, whose notable alumni included the future prime minister, Harold Wilson. An academic child, Nancy enjoyed history and 'anything to do with the English language'. Rugby was not part of Nancy's grammar school life and she recalled the circumstances of how she began to watch rugby league just after World War Two:

My dad used to go occasionally but I had two uncles who used to go regularly. My uncles were both in the war and after they came back [...] they went to all the matches. But I wasn't influenced from home or by family to go, it was my friend, [who] had two brothers. They said they were going one day and I remember I went home, I'd be about fourteen, and, 'cause in those days you did what you were told, and I said to my mum – everybody

<sup>9</sup> Huddersfield C. & A. C. Supporters' Club Committee, 1956 in *Fartown Supporters, Golden Jubilee, 1921-1971*, (ed.) Peter Crabtree, (Huddersfield: Huddersfield C. and A.C. Supporters' Club, 1971), p.36.



worked Saturday mornings then, my dad was working Saturday morning – and I said “can I go to Fartown with Brenda and her brother” and she said “oh, I don’t know, you’ll have to wait until your dad comes home”. So my mum said to my dad “Nancy wants to go to Fartown this afternoon” and my dad said “well let her go, when she’s been once she won’t want to go again” [laughs], and that’s when I started going. I think it was January 1948. We played Batley, that’s all I can remember about it, I didn’t really know what was going on. In those days we got massive crowds. It was good.

Nancy’s father could not have been more wrong. Her trip to Huddersfield that day was arguably the event that would influence her entire life more than other. She found that the Huddersfield club was generally welcoming of women, something reflected in the gender makeup of the crowd:

After the war when we started going, a huge amount of ladies went. It wasn’t like the soccer, if there’s a picture of Huddersfield Town in the *Examiner* there’ll be just one woman here and one there, there’s always more ladies gone to the rugby. To start with there isn’t any trouble at the rugby matches, that makes a difference doesn’t it.

Nancy and her friends had a relatively peaceful time in the Fartown terraces. Men would pass occasional gendered comments, but Nancy remained unfazed: ‘they used to turn round and say “go back home and get on with your knitting” and things like that [...] we just used to ignore them’.<sup>10</sup>

Rugby league fit in with, and even facilitated, Nancy’s other leisure pursuits. She remembered that after a match, her and her friends would ‘go to town, have some tea, and then go to cinema’. As we have seen previously, television ownership was still

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<sup>10</sup> All quotations from: Nancy Beaumont, *Fartown in the Fifties and Sixties*, [Recorded Interview], 09 November, 2012.

something of a luxury for most working-class people during the 1950s, and Nancy recalls there being 'long queues at the cinema' as a result. But being in the queue opened up another geographic horizon for Nancy to explore:

we were in the queue and this couple stood by us, and they started talking to us, and this man called Joe Brook, he ran a coach, and he said if you want to come away on our coach you can come on that so we started going.

This chance encounter with Joe Brook would take Nancy and her friends all over the rugby league north, from Hull in the east to Workington in the west, and they became familiar faces amongst the hard-core Fartown spectatorship. Nancy and her "gang of six" had not thought about becoming more involved until someone suggested it to them at a match. She said

one day we were just chatting on the terrace and a man said "It's the annual meeting of the supporters' club. We've no ladies on, why don't some of you put up" you see, and that's how it started.

The women knew enough to know that women "putting up" for the committee would be something of a shock to the men of the Huddersfield Supporters' Club, so they devised a plan that took a soft, gradual approach:

there were about six of us and we knew if we all put up we wouldn't get on, so there was a lady called Elsie Shaw and myself put up and we got on the committee.

The women were correct in taking a cautious approach, because as Nancy recalled 'it really did cause a furore because the only thing women ever did at Fartown was wash up and make sandwiches [laughs], but anyway we got on'. But once on the committee, the women found it was their sexuality that was called into question by some, deemed the sole motive for their presence on a match day.

it was really funny the first meeting [of] course we were a bit apprehensive about it [laughs] and the chairman go up and he said “well Gentlemen, this is quite an occasion, we’ve never had ladies on the committee before, but we hope they’ll join in and do plenty of work”. There was this chap called Harry Littlewood, he was a little stout man and he used to wear a gold chain with a sovereign on, and he got up and he said “Mr Chairman, I can’t echo those sentiments. Women only come to Fartown for two things; one is to lean over the railings and shout at Johnny Hunter, and the other is to peep over the top of the men’s toilets”. So when I got home my dad said “how have you got on?” and I told him and he said “Nancy, if they’re going to speak like that in front of you I don’t think y’ought to go again” [laughs]. I think I was quite, I wouldn’t say shocked, but I were a bit surprised [laughs].

For Harry, the women were only interested in one thing – sex – and that for him was a repugnant thought. Women simply could not be trusted in the presence of men as they were either distracted by the handsome face of the Australian half-back Hunter, or by the sexual organs of the male spectatorship. The supporters’ club had been a male domain, where men could operate without women, and now women had infiltrated Harry’s sanctum, bringing with them the threat of unbridled feminine sexuality. Conversely, Nancy’s father saw Harry’s speech as the threat, potentially corrupting the purity of his daughter’s mind, with the result perhaps being the sexual awakening of Nancy herself. Both men show display a patriarchal need to *restrict* female sexuality, with one man believing it to be a pre-existing threat to his existence within the supporters’ club community and the other believing that a woman’s presence in a male domain would unleash that sexuality and debase perfect femininity. If Harry had ever supposed himself to be irresistible to women, he need not have worried, for Nancy remembered that ‘they all seemed old men to me, y’know, I was only just out of my teens’.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> All quotations from: Nancy Beaumont, *Fartown in the Fifties and Sixties*, [Recorded Interview], 09 November, 2012.

But Nancy considered that the women's feminine ways did have an invigorating effect on the "old men": 'in the next three or four years we kept getting another lady on, and another, I think we rejuvenated them because we brought fresh ideas into it, so the work began [laughs]'. By 1955, all seven women had been elected to the full supporters' club committee. The women made themselves useful, helping out in general ways at first. However, with increasing influence and confidence, the women decided that there were not enough facilities at Fartown for spectators to enjoy, and in 1956 they went into battle:

we decided that we wanted a tea hut. Some of the men said "it isn't practical", we said "oh it is". So to show them we meant it we all went down one Sunday and we dug the foundations out for the tea hut [laughs] and I got a wheelbarrow full of soil and it ran away with me down the terrace side! [laughs]

The women sought agreement, were met with resistance, but went ahead anyway, with the "official" yearbook omitting the circumstances by which the hut came into existence, simply stating that once the parent club had given permission for the hut to be erected that August, the foundations were dug in the November 'following further meetings'.<sup>12</sup> The hut opened in March 1957 and took £6 19s 5½d. It might have been a 'boon for the terrace-siders' but for the women of the supporters' club it meant hard work and sacrifice, for they were the ones who ran the enterprise.<sup>13</sup> Nancy explained the effort it took every match day to provide the service:

We used to go up before the match and set everything up, we'd a hot soup machine, and I stood on a pop crate and made 36 gallons of oxtail soup. I had to stand on the pop crate because I

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<sup>12</sup> *Fartown Supporters, Golden Jubilee, 1921-1971*, (ed.) Peter Crabtree, (Huddersfield: Huddersfield C. and A.C. Supporters' Club, 1971), p.64.

<sup>13</sup> *Fartown Supporters, Golden Jubilee, 1921-1971*, (ed.) Peter Crabtree, (Huddersfield: Huddersfield C. and A.C. Supporters' Club, 1971), p.65.

wasn't big enough. Tea, soup and coffee. The tea was tuppence a cup and I think the soup and coffee was sixpence. And we sold hot pies, sausage rolls and Cornish pasties, and quite a big variety of sweets. But you see everything was kept in the pavilion so we had to unpack it before the match and pack it back up afterwards.<sup>14</sup>

Unpacking and re-packing was a large job in itself, but the transportation of goods also meant carrying the goods by hand alongside the unlocking and locking of gates. As the *Fartown Supporters Golden Jubilee* book put it, 'it was chaos [....] after each match the goods were manhandled back, and the same procedure to go through again at the next match. You've no idea'.<sup>15</sup> Supporters certainly had no idea, for the booklet omitted the fact that this logistical nightmare was undertaken solely by the women themselves.

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<sup>14</sup> Nancy Beaumont, *Fartown in the Fifties and Sixties*, [Recorded Interview], 09 November, 2012.

<sup>15</sup> *Fartown Supporters, Golden Jubilee, 1921-1971*, (ed.) Peter Crabtree, (Huddersfield: Huddersfield C. and A.C. Supporters' Club, 1971), p.65.



**Figure 577:** The supporters' club refreshment hut opened 2<sup>nd</sup> March, 1957.  
 Back Row: L-R: P. Dickinson, Joyce Rushforth, B. Brook.  
 Front Row: L-R: Margaret Haigh, Nancy Beaumont, M. Whitwham.

This Saturday ritual meant sporting sacrifice for the women of the supporters' club as it curtailed their own enjoyment of the rugby league action. Nancy explained the rota system they put in place to share the workload equitably:

There were two of us always there first to set it up and then the others used to come, because quite a few of them worked on a Saturday morning you see, and we used to take it in turns. We'd serve up to the match starting, then we had a key to get the back of the stand, although we were all members, and half of us would watch the first half and come back before half time, and the

other half would watch the second half, and then they all come back and cleaned up and packed up.

Despite being on the management committee, the Fartown women had put themselves in the position of domestic servants to the rest of the club's spectatorship. Like the women that had volunteered before them they fulfilled the feminine role of "washing up and making sandwiches" ('when we'd washed up we had to throw it down the back [laughs]') just as the men had been used to, but unlike those before her, Nancy and her friends took control of their project and operated on their own terms:

[Watching half a game] was just part of it. We knew that before we built the hut. We thought it would be a facility to the supporters. We obviously wanted to raise money but it was more to perform the service really.

These women used their agency to provide a new amenity and enhance the social experience of others, whilst simultaneously enhancing their own social experience. Their efforts were appreciated by some, and as we shall see, gratitude came from some faraway places.<sup>16</sup>

The women formed a strong bond during their work for Huddersfield and their friendships endured as did their love of rugby league:

we're lifelong friends, we're still friends now. Marlene Barker, Brenda Brown, Joyce Rushforth, unfortunately Joyce isn't with us any more, there were quite a few of us but those were my main friends. Marlene, and Beryl and Jenny, and we all sit together at the match.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> All quotations from: Nancy Beaumont, *Fartown in the Fifties and Sixties*, [Recorded Interview], 09 November, 2012.

<sup>17</sup> Nancy Beaumont, *Fartown in the Fifties and Sixties*, [Recorded Interview], 09 November, 2012.

The only time the women took a break from their voluntary work was in the off-season, when they would all go on holiday together. Nancy was in her twenties just at the time that package holidays became affordable. This ‘mass tourist movement’ started in 1955; in 1938 just over one million British tourist travelled abroad, and that figure had increased to 1.6 million by 1955 and 2.1 million by 1959.<sup>18</sup> Those holidays were remembered with relish:

We used to go on holiday for a fortnight a year, we used to get a holiday we just used to flop. We always went abroad. We always went somewhere different.

The true extent of the work that the women undertook will become more apparent as this chapter unfolds, but one holiday story that Nancy divulged epitomises not only the appreciation of the women’s work but also the camaraderie amongst the Huddersfield spectators:

We once went to Spain on holiday and we stayed at this five-star hotel. The first night we were there we got dressed up and the head waiter was taking us to our table, and this boy shouted as loud as they could “you make better soup in your hut at Fartown than they do in this hotel” [laughs]. We went to the bullring and we [bumped into] some people at a bar and they said “oooo, tea girls from Fartown” [laughs].

When telling this story, the pride Nancy felt at their being recognised was evident in her voice. But far from being associated with the management of the supporters’ club, the women’s collective were designated “tea girls”, branded by their feminine skills of domesticity that were most-valued amongst the Fartown community.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Bill Cormack, *A History of Holidays 1812-1990*, (London: Routledge/Thoemmes Press, 1998), p.109.

<sup>19</sup> All quotations from: Nancy Beaumont, *Fartown in the Fifties and Sixties*, [Recorded Interview], 09 November, 2012.



Nancy chose to spend her leisure time volunteering for the club, and in return she developed a strong social network of close friends that would sustain her throughout her life. The way she described her leisure time is revealing, and shows the extent to which Huddersfield rugby league dominated:

On a Saturday, we'd set off, someone would pick us up from the hairdressers, at half past nine we'd be down in the pools office 'til half past twelve, then the Fartown van'd take us up to Fartown and we'd go get everything ready in the hut, serve in the hut, clean up, go on to the bar, wash up, clean up for Saturday night and then everybody went home just for an hour to have something to eat, then we were back again 'til we closed, and we all had a job on a Saturday night, some'd be behind the bar, raffle, bingo, then the cleaners didn't come in Sunday morning so we had to all clean the bar up, and then we all used to sit down, and we'd been at it so long, there was a little chip shop by the club and he used to stop open, and they used to take the Fartown van up and go for about twenty times.<sup>20</sup> And then we always used to sit until about midnight. And sometimes when we were younger we used to go to Wakefield to a bowling alley [laughs]. And then back again Sunday lunchtime. Pools office Monday night, Tuesday we had off, Wednesday night we had the committee meeting every fortnight, Thursday we had off, although we were on the pools committee as well so every three weeks we ended up meeting on a Thursday. Then on a Friday we were back in the pools office. [laughs]. It's all true, honest!

Between the supporters' club and her full-time job, Nancy had no time for anything else in her life. She confirmed that she worked in paid employment for forty hours a week, and said 'we all nearly did as much at Fartown again'. Nancy's evidence makes clear, through her constant use of the plural pronoun "we", that she was not the only one that went to such lengths for the club.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> "twenty times" meaning twenty portions.

<sup>21</sup> All quotations from: Nancy Beaumont, *Fartown in the Fifties and Sixties*, [Recorded Interview], 09 November, 2012.

In 1961, Nancy became the club's first female officer when she was appointed to the position of treasurer, a post she held for eleven consecutive years. In 1967 she was simultaneously allotted the presidency, becoming the first female president of a rugby league organisation, a post she held concurrently with that of treasurer for two years, before Margaret Haigh was elected President for 1969, and Joyce Rushforth completed the female hat-trick and took over in 1971. When Nancy was elected president, Peter Crabtree, writing in *Rugby League Magazine*, was simultaneously celebratory and patronising:

Rugby League is popularly known as a "man's game" but women can, and do, play a great part in the work that goes on behind the scenes in senior and junior clubs alike. There is an old quotation to the effect that "the female of the species is more deadly than the male", and to use the saying in a different form it is certainly true that when it comes to fund raising, meal preparing and dish-washing, general enthusiasm and the hundred-and-one little jobs that crop up, the ladies will do a better job than the men.<sup>22</sup>

For Crabtree, women do "great work" in undertaking "little" jobs "behind the scenes", his belittling tone underlying the continuity of gendered thought despite the changes that had occurred in women's roles, within rugby league and wider British society. Nancy was in a public role, but her female gender remained banished to the private sphere of domesticity.

Nancy's education gave her learning opportunities that many ordinary working-class women who had not attended grammar school were denied, but the gendered nature of education remained, with the emphasis placed on home economics rather than

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<sup>22</sup> *Rugby League Magazine*, Vol. 2, N<sup>o</sup> 20, December 1966, p.22.

woodwork, and as such girls and young women were not pushed to attend university.<sup>23</sup> When she left school, Nancy spent five years doing clerical work for the Co-op, before moving to a textile mill to work as a secretary, where she remained until its closure twenty years later, finally becoming a surplus textile manager for Oxfam. Whilst working in the textile industry ran in the family, Nancy's education gave her a different life to that of her weaver mother; she, like many women during the post-war period, opted for better paid work in an office environment. The 1951 census returns showed that there were 1,270,456 female clerks and typists, compared with 861,676 men, confirming the feminisation of the workforce.<sup>24</sup> For young, single women such as Nancy, secretarial work 'provided the opportunity to follow independent, private and moderately comfortable lives'.<sup>25</sup> Clerical work was a safe option for women as it offered better pay and conditions than factory or shop work, but fit in with the expectations of motherhood for women, as it

was by definition not a career, and not work that would lead to a career, [...] did not threaten marriage [and] fit neatly into a category of work which was expected to be dropped at marriage or certainly before childbearing.<sup>26</sup>

Women of means had sometimes defied gendered expectations through office work in the late nineteenth century, utilising their education and gaining work that provided them with freedom and self-sufficiency, and Nancy's life story is an example of how such opportunities opened up in the twentieth century for those working-class women who were lucky enough to gain a grammar school place. Nancy shared many similarities with

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<sup>23</sup> Angela Davis, *Modern Motherhood: Women and Family in England, 1945–2000*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012), p.66–67.

<sup>24</sup> Gerry Holloway, *Women and Work in Britain since 1840*, Abingdon: Routledge, p.191.

<sup>25</sup> G. Anderson, 'The White-Blouse Revolution' in *Salford Papers in Economics*, Vol. 88, Nº 8, p.8.

<sup>26</sup> Judith Smith, 'The "New Woman" Knows How to Type', p.2.

the fictional Juliet, Grant Allen's "type-writer girl", who attended Girton College, smoked and enjoyed jaunts into the countryside on her bicycle.<sup>27</sup> Instead, Nancy won her scholarship, became a prolific smoker, then as an adult traversed the north of England on a coach, following Huddersfield Rugby League Club. A Vivie Warren of her day, Nancy remained single throughout her life, but instead of abandoning her parents she looked after them throughout their lives and remained in the Golcar house in which she was born until her own death in 2015.<sup>28</sup>

Nancy's employment gave her transferable skills that were utilised in benefit of the supporters' club, but it also gave her a large degree of freedom within the working day. Nancy explained:

I've always been fortunate where I've worked, because when I worked at the mill there were just two of us in an office, there was Margaret Pilling and myself, Margaret was the treasurer of the supporters' club and I was the secretary, and we used to call it Fartown Sub-Office and there'd be [referee] Billy Thompson come in – I mean they were really good with us at the mill, as long as we got on with our work we could work for Fartown as well – and Billy Thompson come on a Monday morning to have his sending off reports done, we did the first ever sending off report for Wembley, I typed that.<sup>29</sup> Then Dave Valentine'd come with pools business; people'd be coming in bringing their pools money, and then when I moved to Oxfam the chap in charge there was a Wakefield Trinity supporter, so if I wanted [I'd] work through my lunch hour, so I've always been lucky to do things like that.

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<sup>27</sup> Grant Allen, *The Type-Writer Girl*, (ed.) Clarissa Suranyi, (Ontario, Canada: Broadview Press [1897] 2003).

<sup>28</sup> George Bernard Shaw, *Mrs Warren's Profession*, (ed.) Leonard Conolly, (Ontario, Canada: Broadview Press [1893] 2005).

<sup>29</sup> The first sending-off of a player at a Wembley Challenge Cup Final was on 15 May 1971, when Leeds' captain Syd Hynes headbutted Alex Murphy (Leigh).

*So whilst you were at work you were still working for the club as well really, [Nancy laughs] so it was like having two jobs at once?*

Yes, I was multitasking [laughs]. Occasionally I got fed up, but when I got fed up I used to think well nobody's making you do it get on with it [laughs].

Nancy made an important point when she says that nobody made her undertake the work for the supporters' club. She made an active choice for herself and her dedication was of her own making. Crucially though, no one hindered her in making this choice. Her parents were supportive within reason – 'they let me get on with it as long as I behaved. *Did you behave?* Not always! [laughs]' – and her bosses facilitated her during working hours.<sup>30</sup> Nancy was fortunate that her education had allowed her to take on an employment role that gave her a degree of flexibility that she would not have acquired had she worked in a factory or shop. In clerical and secretarial work 'women [had] mastered the art of being invaluable to the men for whom they work', and in performing well Nancy and Margaret proved themselves useful enough in their paid roles that their extra work for Huddersfield's supporters' club was looked upon sympathetically.<sup>31</sup> Nancy and Margaret displayed mental dexterity, a valuable skill for an employer, and such was the level of trust placed in her that when Nancy acted as treasurer on various player benefit committees, the mill owner even allowed her to store the petty cash and accounting books in the safe on the premises. He also further facilitated the sporting passion of his two clerical women:

when we worked at the mill the managing director always used to buy Margaret and myself our season tickets and they were ten

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<sup>30</sup> All quotations from: Nancy Beaumont, *Fartown in the Fifties and Sixties*, [Recorded Interview], 09 November, 2012.

<sup>31</sup> Judith Smith, 'The "New Woman" Knows How to Type', p.11.

and sixpence. *Did he buy those as a bonus?* I should think so, the wages were appalling. The atmosphere was good though.<sup>32</sup>

This perhaps suggests that the managing director was a shrewd businessman; in Nancy and Margaret he had excellent workers that could get their duties completed to such a degree of satisfaction that he felt happy to let them undertake club work in mill time, but it is feasible that he granted this flexibility instead of greater remuneration. Nancy admitted that the wages were appalling, but she remained with the mill for twenty years, framing her gain in terms of “atmosphere”. Nancy was a woman who prioritised pleasure in all aspects of her life, and she found her pleasure in “working” for the club she loved.

The sociability of the supporters’ club became a further priority as in 1957, the supporters’ club set about seeking permission to build its own premises in the form of a clubroom, from which to sell refreshments. A sub-committee of ten were elected to run and manage the building fund scheme, and five of that committee were women: Nancy, Margaret Haigh, B. Brook, Joyce Haigh and Mrs C. Jackson. Any five were deemed to form a quorum, so it is theoretically possible that the women could have gained full control of decision-making at any given time. A pools scheme was drawn up to raise funds, and, as Nancy admitted above, ‘the lady workers did much of the donkey work’.<sup>33</sup> The intention was to fund the building of the hut and to improve the general condition of the buildings and the stands, but also to provide a social space for supporters to use to socialise and relax:

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<sup>32</sup> All quotations from: Nancy Beaumont, *Fartown in the Fifties and Sixties*, [Recorded Interview], 09 November, 2012.

<sup>33</sup> *Tom Webb’s Rugby League Record*, Vol. 1, No 2, October 1962, p.5.

before we opened, built the club, there again there wasn't much social life; we just happened to go to an away match, and we went in the bar at whichever club we were at, and somebody just idly remarked "we could do with a place like this at Fartown" so we all talked about it and by this time we'd got some young, really enthusiastic people on the committee, and there was a piece of spare land at the end of the west stand where we thought this club would just do, so we brought it up in the committee.

We discussed it for a long, long time because we realised that if we opened a club everybody would have to be committed seven days a week. So we decided, we had some money behind us, and we went to the general committee to ask them if we could have this piece of land, and we got a letter back, and it said "we've considered your request. We must inform you we've turned it down because we do not want to turn Fartown into a den of drinking". And we persevered and persevered 'til eventually they said if we produce some plans they'll consider it, so we had some plans drawn up and there was loads of discussion in the committee about what it should be like. So, we submitted these plans to the general committee and they sent back saying wasn't sufficient, could we send an example of the brickwork we were going to use because they wanted it to fit in with the general ambience of the club. We got it, so it was built.

[...] you see the beauty of it was we were open seven nights a week, Saturday afternoon and Sunday lunch. So you got people working all those hours and the only people who got paid were two lovely ladies who used to be the cleaners. So we were making money hand over fist then.<sup>34</sup>

The clubroom ran completely on voluntary work for over twenty years, and it was

Margaret Pilling who undertook the treasury of the bar accounts.<sup>35</sup>

In 1967, the terrace-side hut was extended, and in 1969, bar sales totalled over £1,100. In 1970, the Huddersfield Rugby League Club was in debt, and it was the supporters' club that stepped in with £2,500. Between 1946 and 1971 the supporters'

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<sup>34</sup> All quotations from: Nancy Beaumont, *Fartown in the Fifties and Sixties*, [Recorded Interview], 09 November, 2012.

<sup>35</sup> *Fartown Supporters, Golden Jubilee, 1921-1971*, (ed.) Peter Crabtree, (Huddersfield: Huddersfield C. and A.C. Supporters' Club, 1971), p.75.

club had donated £16,500 to the parent club 'in cash or kind' and to the building funds £150,000.<sup>36</sup> It is no coincidence that for much of this period women had been active, working tirelessly for the club. In an accidental repost to himself, Peter Crabtree, in compiling the golden jubilee book summed up the work of the supporters' club nicely: 'the thousand and one jobs that have been done and the millions of hours given cannot be estimated'. From the evidence presented here, the efforts of the women in this endeavour cannot be underestimated either.<sup>37</sup>



**Figure 58:** The supporters' clubroom, opened September 25<sup>th</sup>, 1965.<sup>38</sup>

Nancy did not see her gender as a barrier to her success:

It never bothered me at all. I just never occurred to me at all. You see, coming back to Oxfam somebody once came up from head

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<sup>36</sup> *Fartown Supporters, Golden Jubilee, 1921-1971*, (ed.) Peter Crabtree, (Huddersfield: Huddersfield C. and A.C. Supporters' Club, 1971), p.73.

<sup>37</sup> *Fartown Supporters, Golden Jubilee, 1921-1971*, (ed.) Peter Crabtree, (Huddersfield: Huddersfield C. and A.C. Supporters' Club, 1971), p.73.

<sup>38</sup> Image: *Fartown Supporters, Golden Jubilee, 1921-1971*, (ed.) Peter Crabtree, (Huddersfield: Huddersfield C. and A.C. Supporters' Club, 1971), p.51.



office and they said to me “working for Oxfam, have you ever felt at a disadvantage because you were a woman?” and my reply was “no, because I never allow myself to be” and that’s always been my attitude. So you see, we were women’s lib. Fartown’s women’s lib we were [laughs].

Nancy framed her experiences anachronistically in terms of “women’s lib” but politically the term did not resonate with her. ‘I’m not very much into that at all, I think it’s all been exaggerated’, she said, ‘I’ve never found it a disadvantage at all, in any of my working life or normal life at all. It’s an attitude of mind really, I think’.<sup>39</sup> Although she denies that she has any interest in feminist politics, Nancy does recognise that she was operating in something of a feminist manner, pushing back the boundaries that kept women from operating in management roles. This ambiguity is prevalent throughout working-class women’s history, and the research presented here certainly corroborates Elizabeth Roberts’ assertion that ‘there was little feeling among the majority of women interviewed that they or their mothers had been particularly exploited by men’.<sup>40</sup> Nancy saw her activity within her own sphere of experience and felt the feminist fight did not apply to her. Nevertheless, any woman or group that has ‘tried to change the position of women, or ideas about women, have been granted the title of feminist’.<sup>41</sup> Nancy and her friends were the “women’s lib” of Huddersfield rugby league, the inadvertent feminists.

## Fifties Glamour to Eighties Pin-Ups: The Sexualisation of Women

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<sup>39</sup> Nancy Beaumont, *Fartown in the Fifties and Sixties*, [Recorded Interview], 09 November, 2012.

<sup>40</sup> Elizabeth Roberts, *Women’s Work*, p.2.

<sup>41</sup> Olive Banks, *Faces of Feminism: A Study of **Feminism as a Social Movement***, (Oxford: M. Robertson, 1981), p.3.

The hard-working women of the supporters' clubs were not always their most celebrated. Huddersfield's "hat-trick" of female presidents (1967-1971) were preceded by another female trio: Huddersfield's National Federation of Rugby League Supporters' Clubs "Rugby League Queens", pictured below:



**Figure 59:** Huddersfield's three successive National Federation of Rugby League Supporters' Clubs "Rugby League Queens".<sup>42</sup>

The first woman mentioned by name in Huddersfield's golden jubilee book was also a queen, as Miss J. Sharpe was elected Yorkshire Federation of Rugby League

<sup>42</sup> *Fartown Supporters, Golden Jubilee, 1921-1971*, (ed.) Peter Crabtree, (Huddersfield: Huddersfield C. and A.C. Supporters' Club, 1971), p.39.

Supporters' Clubs Queen in 1952.<sup>43</sup> The idea of the beauty contest originated in the mid-nineteenth century America by Phineas T. Barnum, as a way of enticing people into his New York museum.<sup>44</sup> In 1921 America held its first "Miss America" contest in 1921, with the ideal beauty limited to young, unmarried, white, heterosexual, cis-gendered women. In inter-war Britain, local custom influenced the queen competitions, or in the case of Manchester's *Daily Dispatch's* search for a Cotton Queen of Great Britain, regional culture and industrial culture were homogenous.<sup>45</sup> Nowhere was this more publicly exemplified than in the Gracie Fields film *Sing As We Go*, from 1934, co-written by J.B. Priestley, who in the same year counted 'factory girls looking like actresses' among the

giant cinemas and dance-halls and cafés [...] cocktail bars [...] greyhound racing and dirt tracks, swimming pools [...] periodicals about film stars [and] swimming costumes and tennis rackets and dancing shoes

that he felt to be typical of the inter-war, modernisation of England.<sup>46</sup> These contests almost always had a commercial benefit to the sponsors, as the winner could be used in advertising a trade, product or a region as a tourist destination. In the years after World War II, beauty contests were more traditionally linked to seaside resorts, with the most popular being on the Lancashire and North Wales coasts. Morcambe had held what was to become the Miss Great Britain competition in 1956 since 1945, at its swimming pool complex.<sup>47</sup> Such competitions permeated into all areas of leisure and commerce, and

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<sup>43</sup> *Fartown Supporters, Golden Jubilee, 1921-1971*, (ed.) Peter Crabtree, (Huddersfield: Huddersfield C. and A.C. Supporters' Club, 1971), p.61.

<sup>44</sup> Candace Savage, *Beauty Queens: A Playful History*, (New York: Abbeville Press, 1998), p.11-13.

<sup>45</sup> Rebecca Conway, 'Making the Mill Girl Modern: Beauty, Industry and the Popular Newspaper in 1930s' England' in *Twentieth Century British History*, Vol. 24, N° 4, 2013, pp.518-541.

<sup>46</sup> J.B. Priestley, *English Journey*, (London: William Heinemann, 1934), p.401.

<sup>47</sup> 'Records of Miss Great Britain' held by London University: London School of Economics, The Women's Library, *National Archives catalogue*. Available: <http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/58042f9d-3af6-45b4-9dc1-929656be9300> [Accessed: 14 February, 2014].

rugby league was no exception, building on the tradition of the Cotton Queens and the northern seaside resorts.

Due to the undocumented nature of women's involvement in rugby league, Collins noted that 'before the 1980s, [...] the most prominent women in rugby league tended to be the "Rugby League Queens", selected each year at supporters' clubs' beauty contests' and the contest did nothing to help overturn the chauvinism inherent within the game.<sup>48</sup> Castleford may have been the first club to elect a queen in April 1951. When reporting to the Yorkshire Association that their April dance made a £7 profit, Castleford mentioned in passing that they elected a Castleford rugby league queen.<sup>49</sup> The comment seemingly went unnoticed, but the notion was being considered by Hunslet in the following October, which resulted in the idea of making it a Yorkshire-wide competition. At the same meeting were the two ladies from the York Supporters' Club, but it was not noted what they made of the idea. A sub-committee was formed to deal with the arrangements and ten clubs agreed to take part.<sup>50</sup> The clubs were responsible for electing their own queen, and the Association bore the expense of guest judges and 'notabilities' for the "Miss Yorkshire Rugby League" final, to be held in Leeds. The contestants were judged in three criteria: receiving ten points for proof of support, ten for personality and deportment and ten for a rugby league quiz. Personality and deportment was to be judged by international full back "Gentleman" Jim Brough, Eddie Waring, plus a female panel of the Lady Mayoress of Leeds, the wife of the Rugby Football League secretary Mrs Fallowfield, and Lady Edith Airey, the wife of the Rugby Football League chairman. The quiz questions

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<sup>48</sup> Tony Collins, *Rugby League in Twentieth Century Britain*, p.155.

<sup>49</sup> Minutes of the Federation of Yorkshire Rugby League Supporters' Clubs. Meeting 17 August, 1951.

<sup>50</sup> Minutes of the Federation of Yorkshire Rugby League Supporters' Clubs. Meeting 14 December, 1951.

would be set and judged by Brough and Waring.<sup>51</sup> The inaugural Miss Yorkshire RL, Miss Jean Bowen, got to attend the Challenge Cup final at Wembley, with two attendants and three members of the Federation.<sup>52</sup> The intention was to raise the profile of the Association as well as raise funds, but when the Queens went to Wembley it did not make the press. The National Federation of Supporters' Clubs took up the idea in too, and the title of Miss Rugby League continued to be contested until the 1980s.

By 1957 the standards of the rugby league quiz section slipped, as the election of Margaret Hawxwell exemplified. The Wakefield Supporters' Club annual handbook explained:

Eighteen year old Margaret won the "Miss Trinity" title [...] from 20 entries [...] – many other girls with aspirations having to be turned away. Margaret came to Wakefield 2 years ago from Guildford (Surrey). Although she is a native of Filey and a stranger to our game when she was elected Queen, Margaret has quickly become accustomed to it and is now one of the keenest supporters. Well played Margaret.

Well played indeed; but one cannot help but wonder whether her interest in rugby league extended beyond the season of her reign. Conversely, some women entrants did take their rugby league knowledge seriously. Eighteen year-old sixth-form student Claire Scott, of Leeds, became Leeds Rugby League Queen in 1964, and was 'swotting for months' in order to pass the rugby league questions at the Yorkshire Rugby League Queen final. 'I love rugby and I wanted more than anything else to go to Wembley', she told the *Daily Herald* after her victory. The article made no reference at all Claire's appearance, perhaps

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<sup>51</sup> Minutes of the Federation of Yorkshire Rugby League Supporters' Clubs. Meeting 31 October, 1952.

<sup>52</sup> Minutes of the Federation of Yorkshire Rugby League Supporters' Clubs. Meeting 24 May, 1952.

a reflection of how seriously Claire herself took the sport.<sup>53</sup> Whilst the rugby league element was introduced to the Miss RL contest, its importance was subjugated to those of personality and deportment, and popularity. Less conventionally attractive women were not going to win, no matter what their rugby league knowledge. The queens were women of rugby league on restrictive terms, promoting an ideal femininity to which all women in the game should aspire, but only a minority could realistically achieve. Nevertheless, the pressure on all women to conform to the “Miss Rugby League” standard remained.



**Figure 60:** Miss Wakefield Trinity, Margaret Hawxwell.<sup>54</sup>



**Figure 61:** 1964, Claire Scott, Miss Leeds and Yorkshire Rugby League Queen.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> *Daily Herald*, 23 March, 1964, p.10.

<sup>54</sup> 'Margaret Hawxwell' [Photograph] in *Wakefield Trinity Supporters' Club Handbook*, 1957-58. RFL Archives.

<sup>55</sup> 'Claire Scott' [Photograph] in *Daily Herald*, 23 March, 1964, p.10.



**Figure 62:** 1971-2, the skirts get shorter. Pauline Varley, Miss Leeds Rugby League, 1971-72.<sup>56</sup>



**Figure 63:** 1983, skirts not required. Geraldine Fuller, Miss Rugby League.<sup>57</sup>

Figures 59 to 62 reflect how the style of the Miss Rugby Leagues changed between the 1950s and the 1980s. The British media hyperbolised their interest in the female form, and the first photograph featuring nudity appeared in *The Sun* on November 17<sup>th</sup>, 1970.<sup>58</sup> In 1974, Howson-Algraphy, a manufacturer of lithographic printing plates, used a series of twelve topless models to congratulate Leeds Rugby League's Ray Batten on his testimonial. Reflecting the numbers in a rugby league team, their thirteenth image was "Miss Print" Jennifer Cummings, whose headshot was conventional in contrast with those

<sup>56</sup> 'Pauline Varley' [Photograph], *The Leeds Loiner: Leeds Rugby League Supporters' Club Handbook, 1971-72*.

<sup>57</sup> 'Geraldine Fuller' [Advertisement], 1983. Miscellaneous Press Cuttings, RFL Archives.

<sup>58</sup> Rebecca Loncraine, 'Bosom of the Nation: Page Three in the 1970s and 1980s', in (ed.) Mina Gorji, *Rude Britannia*, (London: Routledge, 2007), p.96.

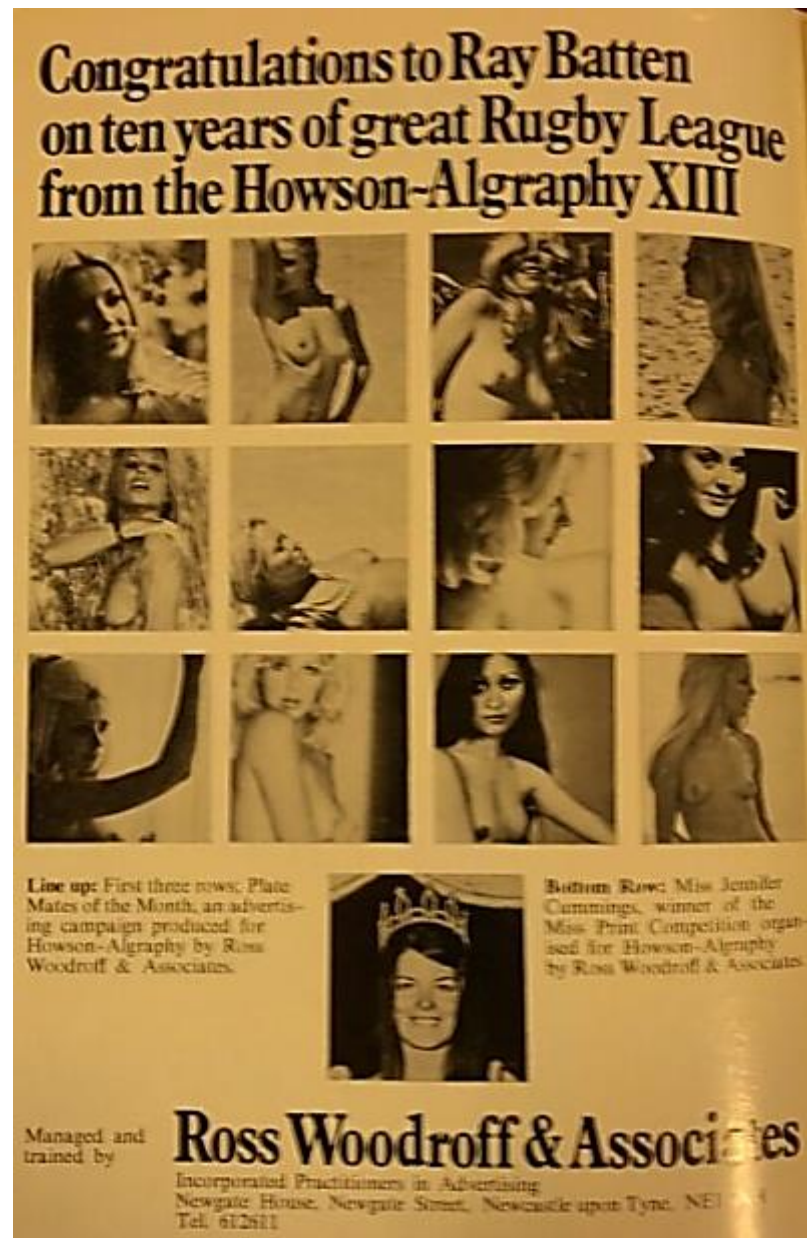
of the glamour models depicted above.<sup>59</sup> By the 1980s, rugby league exploited this trend for the hyper-sexualisation of women and images of Miss Rugby Leagues wearing only rugby shirts and high heels were a commonplace marketing tool for selling replica shirts. Miss Rugby League events were originally initiated to make a profit at the “coronation” dance or dinner, but by the 1980s the sport used them as a relatively cheap form of selling goods and raising the clubs’ and sport’s profile amongst the media. The competition came to dominate the image of women in rugby league, and just as some have seen the advent of “page three” as a backlash against the second-wave feminism that was emerging in the 1960s and the Women’s Liberation Movement, perhaps some part of rugby league embraced this in response to the rising tide of women becoming active and successful in what was previously a male arena, opposition to the likes of Doris Beard, who had been appointed secretary at Bradford Northern in March 1960, or the more pervasive style of Nancy Beaumont and Huddersfield’s “women’s lib”.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> ‘Howson-Algraphy Advertisement’ [Advertisement] in *Ray Batten Testimonial Brochure*, 1974, p.1.

<sup>60</sup> *Telegraph and Argus*, 23 March, 1960, p.12.





**Figure 64:** Howson-Algraphy congratulates Ray Batten using twelve topless images.<sup>61</sup>

Whilst this may have been something of a disheartening message for the average female rugby league fan, there were brief indications of a fledgling progressive attitude emerging towards women in the game in the sixties. Tom Webb was something of a champion of women. Webb was a teacher from Oldham, an active trade unionist and a rugby league statistician. He and his wife set up the *Rugby League Record* in 1962 in order

<sup>61</sup> 'Howson-Algraphy Advertisement' [Advertisement] in *Ray Batten Testimonial Brochure*, 1974, p.1.

to offer a differing opinion to the weekly *Rugby Leaguer* that was the only widely available magazine in circulation devoted to the sport. Aware of the female readership, and perhaps influenced by a trade unionist sensibility of inclusivity, he appealed for every reader to 'persuade one friend to give a regular order to his or her newsagent'.<sup>62</sup> From the very first issue, Webb celebrated the rise in popularity the sport had among women, in a column entitled "Shall we join the Ladies?":

in my young days, only a few ladies braved the elements to watch the game. Today, husbands and wives share their pleasure and boys take their girl friends along, and the result is that the fair sex are as knowledgeable and as enthusiastic as their partners. This is to the good. Take your lady to the match and enjoy it together

he encouraged.<sup>63</sup> Men could be reluctant to do this, but not always for fear of women encroaching on their masculinity, but sometimes for fear of being out enthused:

talking to one of our writers, the Editor suggested that he took his wife to Rugby matches. "Nay, I mustn't get her interested, or she'll know more about the game than I do. She'd be keener than I am. I'd even have to start watching A-team matches" was the reply.<sup>64</sup>

Webb also put women on the cover of his magazine. The first issue featured Shirley Bassey and Wakefield Trinity player Derek Turner with the Challenge Cup, and the second issue showed Tom and his wife discussing the game with young rugby players in Oldham. He was acutely aware that his magazine would be read by women and not just idly perused in a distracted manner at that:

any male reader [he wrote] might pass this page to his good lady to read. I bet he doesn't get his copy of the "Record" back until she has finished it'.

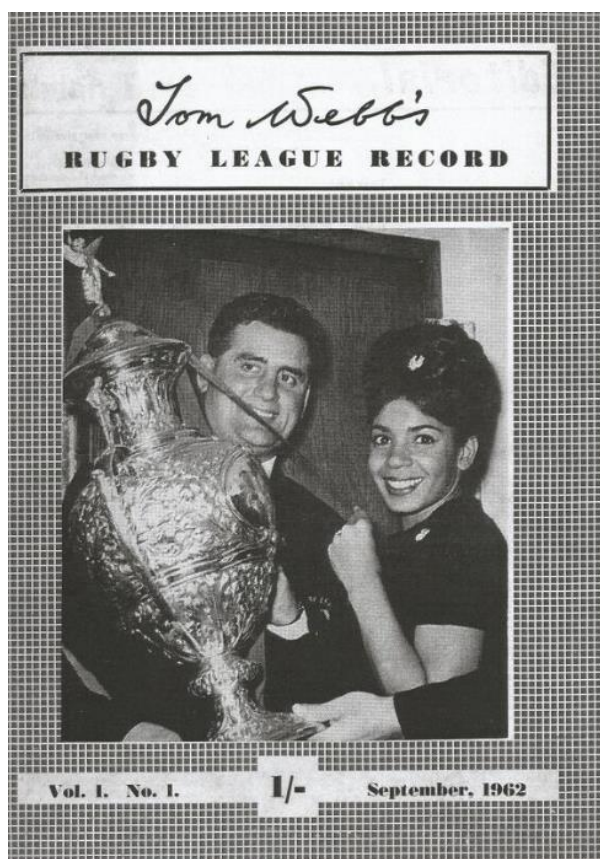
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<sup>62</sup> *Tom Webb's Rugby League Record*, Vol. 1, No 3, p.1.

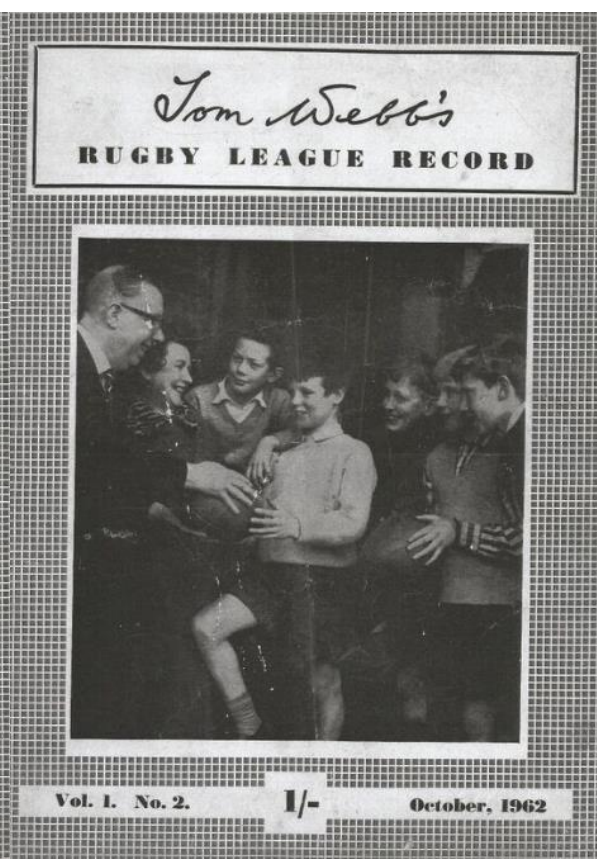
<sup>63</sup> *Tom Webb's Rugby League Record*, Vol. 1, No 1, p.6.

<sup>64</sup> *Tom Webb's Rugby League Record*, Vol. 1, No 1, p.6.

The financial burden of publishing made it impossible for the *Rugby League Record* to continue beyond three issues, which is a great shame because it promised to have a greater degree of gender inclusivity than the rest.



**Figure 65:** Shirley Bassey with the Challenge Cup.<sup>65</sup>



**Figure 66:** Mrs Webb.<sup>66</sup>

'They've a girl as boss of their rugby team!'<sup>67</sup>

<sup>65</sup> *Tom Webb's Rugby League Record*, Vol. 1, No 1, front cover.

<sup>66</sup> *Tom Webb's Rugby League Record*, Vol. 1, No 2, front cover.

<sup>67</sup> Research contained in this section was previously published (in modified form) during the preparation of this thesis in the following publication: Victoria Samantha Dawson, "'They've a girl as boss...'" 13 *Inspirations: The Guiding Lights of Rugby League*, (ed.) Tony Hannan, (Leeds: Scratching Shed, 2014), pp.117-138.

Gender inclusivity was something that Kathleen “Kay” Emily Ibbetson took for granted. Kay was born into a typical working-class family in the Sculcoates area of Hull on August 11<sup>th</sup>, 1923. Her twenty-seven-year-old mother, Kate, came from Dundee and was the daughter of a shipyard driller. By the time Kate was 14 the family had moved to Hull, undoubtedly due to her father finding work within Hull’s extensive shipping industry. Her father, Thomas Ibbetson, was born in Hull in 1894 and was the son of a general labourer and warehouseman. In 1911, aged seventeen, Tom was a light porter at a paint manufactory alongside an elder brother.<sup>68</sup>

Tom Ibbetson was responsible for Kay’s love affair with rugby league, which began from an early age when she used to go to watch Hull Kingston Rovers with her father. She, like many children, would avoid paying by slipping under the turnstiles.<sup>69</sup> Kay was very close to her parents throughout their lives and in 1950, aged twenty-seven, she remained at the family’s first known address, 8 Keble Grove, east Hull, with her mother and father. They remained there until 1970 when forty-seven year old Kay and her mother moved to the recently-built Bransholme estate, in the north of the city.<sup>70</sup> In 1958, entrepreneurial Kay set up her own business, Clerical Services, which began operating from 25 Bishop Lane in Hull’s old town. Clerical Services was an employment agency that also offered typewriting and copying services to local businesses. Kay had a keen business acumen and according to *Rugby League Magazine*, business, rather than on the terraces at Craven

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<sup>68</sup> ‘Ibbetson, Thomas’, *1911 Census of England, Wales, Scotland, Channel Islands and Isle of Man*. Available: [www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com)

<sup>69</sup> *Rugby League Magazine*, August 1964, p.24.

<sup>70</sup> Hull Electoral Rolls, Hull History Centre.

Park, is where Kay 'developed the confidence and sure touch of mixing in a man's world'.<sup>71</sup>

Kay's rugby league career began whilst she was involved in youth club work at Maybury Road Youth Club in East Hull, and in 1958, realising that the club did not have a rugby league team, she set one up. However, the team were expelled from the club for a misdemeanour involving alcohol. Kay, a singular woman who advocated discipline, strongly believed the punishment was too severe. Convinced of the social benefits of rugby league for young boys, she backed her team, saying "rather than let these boys be without any guidance or interest, I resigned and formed a club for them".<sup>72</sup> Resigning from the youth club meant that Kay not only had to organise the team, but train them too, something unheard of for a woman outside of the teaching profession. She was very knowledgeable about the game, and preferred a fast, open style of rugby; the type of rugby she enjoyed to watch. In later years she spoke fondly of how she used to pass the ball around and was proud of doing so.<sup>73</sup>

At the same time, at Craven Street Youth Club, a battle was going on over who would take charge of the Championship winning under-17s side the following season. It was usual for a coach to take on an under-17s side and see them through their under-19s season too, but at Craven Street, under-17s coaches Dennis Laws and Fred Whittaker had

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<sup>71</sup> *Rugby League Magazine*, August 1964, p.24.

<sup>72</sup> *Hull and Yorkshire Times*, 28 January, 1961, p.1.

<sup>73</sup> *Hull and Yorkshire Times*, 28 January, 1961, p.1.

something of an argument with the under-19s coach Bill Robinson, because Bill wanted to take the under-19s team again after his boys had progressed to open age. Bill had apparently done this before, but this time, Dennis stood his ground. He had built his team well, and had future-professional players like Flash Flanagan, Bob Coverley, Alan Burwell and Ted McNamara playing in his side. Having just won the championship, Dennis did not want to give up his team easily, nor did his team want to leave him.<sup>74</sup>

Assistant Fred Whitaker got in touch with Maybury Youth Club, where Kay had set up her under-17s side, and the Craven Street players went there to train. The team were all set to transfer to Maybury, but when Alan Burwell and Mike Bullock went to the youth club dance one night, the club told Burwell that he could not come in. Burwell went to Riley High School and the headmaster, having discovered that he planned to attend the dance, had rung the club expressing his wish that Burwell would be denied entry as he should be at home studying for his exams. To this day Alan has no idea how his headmaster found out he was planning to go to the dance. At the next training session, the captain of the team said that if Burwell wasn't allowed in the youth club then the full team wouldn't be going in again. The transfer to Maybury was off. With the two youth teams looking for new homes, they joined forces and the new East Hull Rugby League Football Club was born, under the leadership of Kay.<sup>75</sup>

'Scorn and ridicule are generally the just and deserved rewards of women who try to talk Rugby League – a real man's preserve if ever there was one' stung the opening

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<sup>74</sup> Alan Burwell, *Kay Ibbetson and East Hull*, [Recorded Interview], 06 December, 2012.

<sup>75</sup> Alan Burwell, *Kay Ibbetson and East Hull*, [Recorded Interview], 06 December, 2012.

lines of N. R. Maplethorpe, in *Rugby League Magazine*. ‘This then must be the measure of Kay Ibbetson’s success’ he went on, ‘to have overcome male prejudice and be accepted as one of them in the amateur Rugby League code’.<sup>76</sup> Unusually for a rugby league writer, Maplethorpe recognised the male prejudice that women faced in the sport.

Kay made front page news in January 1961 when the *Hull and Yorkshire Times* lauded her as the ‘belle of the oval-shaped ball’ with the headline ‘They’ve a girl as boss of their rugby team’. Whilst journalist John Rodgers emphasised the masculinity of rugby league, he could not hide his admiration of Kay:

For a woman, Kay Ibbetson, a tall, attractive, mature redhead, certainly has one of the strangest ambitions – she wants enough money to build a permanent headquarters for a boys’ rugby club. Repeat: rugby – that rough, tough game for brawny men. Belle of the oval-shaped ball, Miss Kay is the only female rugby club secretary in the whole of Yorkshire, and her beau is East Hull Rugby League FC. A woman who can control 35 lusty, high-spirited youths, and silence the sniggers of rival males, must have some fine qualities, but it is surprising not to find her as large and tough as a Sherman tank.

Kay was very much the boss, organising everything. As the club’s secretary she looked after the club’s administration, but she was not afraid of hard work and remained very hands on, continuing to coach the younger lads at times. The teams played matches at East Park, but Kay had great difficulty in finding the boys somewhere to train. “I called on every hall in East Hull, but no one wanted 35 lads bouncing on their floors” she said. Her persistence paid off however, and the vicar of St. John’s, the Reverend P. Haynes,

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<sup>76</sup> *Rugby League Magazine*, August 1964, p.24.

eventually lent her the use of his hall. However, this was only temporary, and sporadic, so the club frequently had to move about.<sup>77</sup>

Other clubs were suspicious of East Hull for having a woman as a secretary, but Kay shrugged off criticism. A kindly disciplinarian, she found no difficulty in controlling a large number of boys. She advocated good behaviour on the field, saying:

“Our boys are fairly well-mannered. It doesn’t matter what they say in front of me, I’ve got cloth ears. But I don’t like them to swear on the field. It is not sportsmanship. Both our teams play cleanly and, above all, they are enthusiastic. That’s what gives me so much heart to do things for them.”

Determined to bring some stability to the club, she told the *Hull and Yorkshire Times*, ““Give me five years and I’ll have a club house or my name’s not Ibbetson!””. She was very proud of who she was and clearly good at what she did, because she had a club house in a mere ten months.<sup>78</sup>

Albert Draper, a director at Hull KR, put Kay in touch with a businessman who was willing to let her rent a warehouse in Hedon, a village just to the east of the city. The former grain store had been unoccupied for eight years previously, and when Kay took it on she ignored the rat-infestation and focused on the goal of making it a permanent home for the club. Kay and the boys set about raising money for refurbishments, and with the generosity of Hull KR, Hull FC and other local businesses, Kay raised a total of £285 for the renovations, which she and the club members mostly did themselves to keep the

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<sup>77</sup> *Hull and Yorkshire Times*, 28 January, 1961, p.1.

<sup>78</sup> All quotations from *Hull and Yorkshire Times*, 28 January, 1961, p.1.



costs down. Her motives were purely about social good. East Hull's new headquarters were to be used as a youth club, as Kay wanted somewhere for "her boys" and girls to relax and take part in normal youth club activities. She said:

"So many youngsters at youth clubs are hampered by regulations and red tape and they don't enjoy themselves. Here we want to give them advice rather than authority, and we've built up respect between ourselves and the boys by friendship [...] all of them come to me when they're in trouble or have problems. By giving them responsibility and letting them virtually build this clubhouse themselves, we've something to be proud of, and it means a lot more to them than a clubhouse they could just walk straight into."<sup>79</sup>

A successful open age side was developed that season, and East Hull became a breeding ground for talent; players from the club that went on to become professionals included Hull's Trevor Carmichael and Roger Booth and Hull KR's John Moore and Alan Burwell.

In May 1963 Kay facilitated a five-day trip to France for the open age team, making East Hull the first Yorkshire amateur club to play international football. Matches were arranged against a Paris XIII and the semi-professional Regiment de Jonville, a side made up of members of the French Army. For most East Hull players, this was a first trip abroad or at least on an aeroplane. For Kay, arranging the trip was not always easy and, as Kay's friend Julie Dunham was aware, she met with some opposition because 'she was a [single] woman going away with men'.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> *Hull and Yorkshire Times*, 18 November, 1961, p.4.

<sup>80</sup> Julie Dunham, *Kay Ibbetson*, [Recorded Interview], 24 February, 2013.



**Figure 67:** East Hull go to France, 1963.<sup>81</sup>

The East Hull team were recognised all over Paris and treated like film stars. Mike recalled that waitresses in cafes would come up and talk to them about the games, and one player even got his studs put into his boots for free, which was fortunate because in reality the players were flat broke. Mike himself was newly married and nearly did not go. As a general labourer on the docks, the “20 odd” pounds the trip cost was a lot of money. The players were on such tight budgets they ate chicken and chips for the whole trip, but Kay made sure that the women in the men’s lives were not forgotten. She arranged for each player to take home a token gift, a small bottle of the Jacques Heim’s perfume J’Aime, which inspired Christian Dior’s own J’Adore. Heim, a contemporary of Dior, was a Parisian designer, manufacturer of women’s furs and couture and the inventor of the bikini. Luckily for the author, Mike Bullock’s wife Ann kept her bottle, and despite the

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<sup>81</sup> Joe Tripp, *East Hull go to France, 1963* [photograph].

bottle being a little mouldy on the inside it still smells absolutely divine. The gift, however small, indicates that Kay thought holistically and realistically about the club. She understood that the women were making sacrifices at home so that their men could play international rugby league and deserved to be thanked accordingly. Kay made sure that for the team the France trip was not all about rugby league either. They received a cultural education visiting the Louvre and Notre Dame, and took in the sights, just as she organised.<sup>82</sup>

East Hull were defeated in France, but victorious at home, as that 1963/64 season also saw East Hull become the triumphant winners of the Council Cup. Off the field, Kay's success and dedication to rugby league was such that in the same season she was the first woman ever to be appointed to the Hull and District Amateur Rugby League Council. The council's meetings of club secretaries took place at The Ritz club on Holderness Road on Tuesday evenings, where Kay would have been the only woman amongst approximately fifty men from the other teams in the leagues. "At meetings I would imagine she gave as good as she took, knowing her!" remembered former East Hull player Mike Bullock.

Kay was not the first female amateur club secretary; that honour goes to Rose Kyle. Kay was the next long-term female secretary, clocking up six seasons at East Hull, and during her time only two other women took up posts in Keighley and Hensingham, each lasting one and two seasons respectively. What is remarkable about Kay in contrast to these other women, is just how dedicated she was and what she achieved beyond the secretarial role in her six seasons at East Hull.

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<sup>82</sup> Mike Bullock, *Kay Ibbetson and East Hull*, [Recorded Interview], 12 February, 2013.



**Figure 68:** Kay and the Hull and District Amateur Rugby League Council.<sup>83</sup>

We can begin to get a full picture of the woman Kay was from 1958, when Kay began her clerical agency and her pursuits in rugby league. Mike Bullock remembers her as a happy, outgoing person who did all the organising for everything:

She had a laugh and joke with you and you could say things back to her, she'd give you just as good like. That's the type of person she was. She was a character in her own right.

Mike can remember thinking:

that she shouldn't come into the changing rooms when we were getting changed which she did quite often. In them days it was quite embarrassing and we'd all turn around. It's not like now, nowadays they'll go in and do all sorts but in them days women didn't do such as that. But Kay was one on her own, with her red flaming hair. Quite outward and boisterous was Kay; would put people in their place. Those are the things that you remember about her. She was well before her time, it didn't bother her at

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<sup>83</sup> Dennis Laws, *Kay and the Hull and District Amateur Rugby League Council*, [Photograph], n.d.

all. Kay socialised with everybody and took participation in most of the things. She did what club secretaries did and beyond that really.

Graham Rumble played for East Hull under 17s in 1962-63, and remembers that Kay 'was a very bubbly character and her enthusiasm rubbed off on the players'. He recalls her being 'a very attractive lady with flame hair' and like Mike 'found it a bit strange when she was in the dressing rooms but we got used to it after a while'. Generally, the players did not know anything about her personally, but Graham remembers that Kay left an impression, as he went on to say, 'for me to remember these things nearly fifty years on shows that she had an effect on us all'.<sup>84</sup>

Kay's father Tom died in December 1967, which coincides with the time she left East Hull, however exactly why she left East Hull at the time of the merger is not known. In 1971, when Kay and her mum moved to Bransholme, her business, Clerical Services, ceased to appear in the telephone directory. Records for her company have not been found, but it is perhaps telling that in 1962 when the category 'employment agencies' appears in the phone book Kay's was one of four listed. In its final year, it was one of seven, and in the following year there were nine competing for business.<sup>85</sup>

Perhaps a major factor in the closure of her business was her marriage in 1971 to Arthur Maule, who moved into Logan Close with Kay and her mother. Together, Kay and

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<sup>84</sup> Graham Rumble, *Kay Ibbetson* [Email]. Message sent to Victoria Dawson, 28 June, 2012, 02:24.

<sup>85</sup> Hull Area Telephone Directories, 1962-1971. Hull History Centre.

Arthur pair set up K.E.A. Coaches in their name (quite literally as it is possible the acronym stands for Kathleen Emily and Arthur) which advertised as 'specialists in private hire at home and abroad' and operated out of Wincolmllee. However, the business did not last long, for in 1976, the adverts disappear, and a year later, so does Arthur's name from the electoral roll. On the June 17<sup>th</sup>, 1977 K&A International Hauliers file for bankruptcy, and the notice in the *London Gazette* lists Arthur as an HGV driver and Kay as a stenographer.<sup>86</sup>

Marriage over, and seemingly in financial trouble, Kay then suffered what was perhaps her biggest trauma in 1979, when her mum, Kate, died aged 83. Kay had lived with her mum most, if not all, of her life. The misery was prolonged as it took six years, until 1983, for the bankruptcy file to be closed. Kay was aged 63. The following year, Kay moved into 88 Amberley Close, Bransholme, and in 1995 went round the corner to 105, the home that would be her last.<sup>87</sup>

Devoted to East Hull, Kay disapproved of anyone not fully committing to the club. She told Julie Dunham of the time she berated a player who could not go to France simply because his girlfriend would not let him:

If she'd committed herself to something, everybody should commit their selves to something and no amount of excuses would be tolerated; if she said she wanted him there [...] he should be there for the team and no mistaking.

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<sup>86</sup> Hull Area Telephone Directories, 1962-1971. Hull History Centre; *London Gazette*, 23 June, 1977, p.8212.

<sup>87</sup> Hull Electoral Rolls, Hull History Centre.

Julie remembered that Kay was proud of her time in rugby. She did meet obstructions, but “Kay’s never backed down. She was a feisty, determined person. And if she set her mind to do something she would see it through.”<sup>88</sup> Julie understood that in her post-rugby days, possibly in the 1970s, Kay worked as a steward on North Sea Ferries as a purser on perfume section. Julie said “She’s always worked in male society, like in the Army and on the ferries so she sort of made her mark as a female working with men.”

Sadly, Kay’s life after rugby was not easy. She told Julie of the pain of losing her parents. ‘Her mum was her world,’ said Julie.

I think she suffered a breakdown when she died. She did miss her mum often. She’d spend hours talking about her mum, saying how she was a red head and she inherited her temperament. She was ‘brought up proper’ as she said.

Sadly, Kay and her brother quarrelled and the relationship was never repaired: “I don’t think there was any love lost when he went”, said Julie.<sup>89</sup>

However, despite her drive and spectacular achievements, in 1967 Kay disappears from rugby league history. We know from the Rugby Football League’s Official Guides that Kay remained at the helm of East Hull until the 1966-67 season, when East Hull became New Embassy and Brian Robins took over as the new club’s secretary.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Julie Dunham, *Kay Ibbetson*, [Recorded Interview], 24 February, 2013.

<sup>89</sup> Julie Dunham, *Kay Ibbetson*, [Recorded Interview], 24 February, 2013.

<sup>90</sup> Rugby Football League Official Guides 1954-1964, RFL Archives.

## Conclusion

Kay's accomplishments would not have been possible in an earlier time. The 1960s brought change, at least to young white people, and in the words of Sheila Rowbotham 'the yeast rose through culture before it rose through politics'.<sup>91</sup> The emergence of youth culture brought with it a general shift in attitudes, one that led to the publication of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. Society's cultural perceptions of women were changing, and women attained greater freedoms over their reproductive capabilities, but the perception of women's roles still harked back to the 1950s. Nevertheless, the change in outlook during the 1960s, in conjunction with Kay's commitment and talent for organisation, opened up opportunities for her within rugby league.

Yet rugby league forgot about Kay and her achievements in a way that probably would not have happened so quickly if she were male. The suspected impact of her marriage on her participation in rugby league is another example of how a woman's life cycle can impede access to leisure, whilst also indicating the extent to which Kay's activity within rugby league was defined by her relationships with men. The histories of Nancy, Kay and the rugby league queens are exemplars of the continuity and change that women were subject to both in the game and British society as a whole. This thesis ends with Kay, because she is perhaps the last in the line of the "angels of the sport" in a traditional sense that began with Isabella Boardman.

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<sup>91</sup> Sheila Rowbotham, *A Century of Women*, p.338.



Of course, there is much more of the story to be told, from the 1970s and beyond, as the women's involvement in sport underwent seismic change, and the focus was about women playing sport for its own sake. Second-wave feminism and the Women's Liberation Movement brought the question of equal rights to the fore, and pushed for women to become more equal participants in society. Sport itself became more important as media coverage of sport and its personalities began to increase. This brought with it an increased media interest in sportswomen, with athletes such as Mary Rand, Dorothy Hyman and Anita Londesborough, the latter two hailing from the north of England, gaining high-profile status. But women's role in sport began to be seen largely in terms of their participation as athletes while their off-field contribution continued to be ignored. The north of England itself began to change, as traditional industry began to disappear, and, alongside the ongoing programme of slum clearances, communities began to disintegrate and the home-centred society became the norm. The old world upon which the industrial north and rugby league had been built was disappearing: a new chapter in its history and of women in the sport was about to be written.

## Conclusion

This thesis does not offer itself as a conclusion to the history of women's participation in rugby league culture, but a beginning. The stories presented here are an attempt at offering a new perspective and interpretation of women's involvement in sport, and a first attempt at documenting the history of women in English rugby league. It has endeavoured to demonstrate two things: firstly, that women have always been involved in rugby league in a variety of acknowledged, but predominantly unacknowledged ways, and secondly, that the involvement of women has been shaped and determined by the prevailing and changing gender relationships in wider society. It began by re-examining the case of Isabella Boardman and her facilitation of Broughton Rangers, and investigated other cases of women doing the same in the late nineteenth century. It has considered the crucial part played by women volunteers in organising financial support to aid their clubs through the harsh economic times of the interwar years via supporters' clubs. It has documented the experiences of women who have reached far into their communities, extending their love and talents beyond themselves.

It has shown the work of teachers such as Kathleen Geraghty that have nurtured rugby talent in schools, and women doing youth work with teams, such as Rose Kyle and Kay Ibbetson, who created and maintained amateur clubs and, in the case of Rose, nursed a fledgling professional club, in the era post-World War Two. The sense of pride, place and shared history that has embodied a community was brought to the fore in the documenting of the women's carnival fundraising matches in Workington's Marsh and Quay, and an insight into lives devoted to creating a thriving social scene for themselves

and others within rugby league was gained through the narrative of Nancy Beaumont, and her friends Joyce Rushforth and Margaret Pilling, and the Fartown women in Huddersfield. Most of these women have never been acknowledged in the sport, let alone had their stories told. In this way, this thesis has allowed the stories and the voices of these women to be heard, and recovered the almost completely unrecorded involvement of women in rugby league.

This thesis has sought to highlight the ways in which women's participation in the sport was shaped and conditioned by the dominant gender relations of the time. It has shown that the intersection between class, gender, leisure and sport are context-specific and context-dependent.<sup>92</sup> This can be seen in the determination of the men who controlled rugby league and actively prevented women from playing the game in face of a perceived threat from women's soccer after World War One, when women were actively encouraged to play association lest they encroach on masculine rugby territory. Perhaps most importantly, this is illustrated by the way in which women's participation off the field was circumscribed by perceptions of women's submissive and supportive roles within society. In short, the price that women paid for being accepted as volunteers in the sport was that they were only allowed to take part if they did so within the confines of the masculine framework that reinforced their position in the domestic sphere and as wives and/or mothers. It was not until the societal changes in the later post-World War Two period that women like Kay Ibbetson and Doris Beard could be allowed to undertake leadership roles within amateur and professional clubs.

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<sup>92</sup> Judy Giles, *Women, Identity and Private Life*, p.13.

As well as voluntary involvement in the same, significant numbers of women were *involuntarily* involved. As the thesis has demonstrated, the wives, mothers or daughters of players had their lives shaped by the vicissitudes of their male's rugby career. The wives of players were responsible for washing their husbands' playing kits, nursing them when injured and providing psychological support when matches did not go their way. Women who were the wives of club and league officials sometimes could derive some small measures of status through their association with their husband's official role, such as presenting trophies and medals, and even sometimes having trophies named after them as reward for their husband's undertaking of financial liability. But wives and families of players could suffer serious financial and economic hardship if injury, loss of form or even death afflicted a husband or father who played the game.

Histories of the sport, with the exception of Collins, have upheld the myth that rugby had "no dealings" with women. Whilst rugby league's administrators may not have welcomed women, women have found ways to operate within the sports patriarchal framework. This study has strived to find "another way of telling" the story of rugby league, and whether it will succeed in changing the narrative of women's involvement in rugby league remains to be seen. Nevertheless, it has succeeded in taking a different, transformative approach, implicitly rejecting the narrow focus of much of the historical writing on women's involvement in sport that focuses on the *playing* of sport, and in offering a new way of looking at sports history has demonstrated that the extent of women's participation in sport as a whole was far more extensive than has previously been thought. This research shows that there are myriad ways that women can engage

with sport in a meaningful way, and that a fundamental change in the questions asked by historians of sport can broaden and enrich the history. Not only that, it can do so on women's terms, by seeking the usually overlooked measures of success that exist outside of the patriarchal, "rigid model" of history. It can be argued that the narrow emphasis on women's athletic participation has reinforced the marginalisation of those women who preferred to engage with sport on a non-playing basis and who formed the vast majority of women involved in sport. This constitutes a major lacuna within sports history that, this thesis suggests, has led to a one-sided presentation of women within the history of sport. This has led to an over-reliance on the experience of middle-class women (whose access to leisure time was much greater than that of working-class women) and a somewhat "Whiggish" analysis of the history of women's sport that equates progress towards gender equality in sport with increasing numbers of women players.

This study has demonstrated that, whether on or off the pitch, participation in sport was severely circumscribed by the roles ascribed to women by society. The dominant masculine ethos of sport that prevented women from playing rugby league in the 1920s also confined women's soccer to the margins of sport by restricting it to a purely supportive and subordinate role that reflected the position of women in society in general. Far from being a "threat" to men's soccer, women's soccer in the 1920s was confined to a very narrow role in supporting charitable activity and entirely dependent on the approval of the Football Association, as can be seen in its almost complete collapse after the FA banned women from playing soccer on its clubs' pitches in 1921. The ease with which this ban could be implemented, with barely a word of protest, shows why

women's participation in sport in and of itself does not necessarily lead to gender equality, either in sport or society as a whole. Therefore, this thesis suggests that the study of women's involvement in sport that begins and ends on the pitch is fundamentally flawed. Women's sporting activities can only be viewed in its full complexity by starting with the position of women in society and understanding women's lived experiences, understanding how gender relationships shape their leisure activities. These relationships are also crucially shaped by class, which presents both economic and cultural barriers to their participation in wider society, let alone in sports.

This is not to say that women did not have agency. These women's experiences forged their own 'quiet meaningfulness' within the restrictions under which they were placed.<sup>93</sup> The women documented within these pages used their initiative to secure positions within clubs that gave that substantial authority, if not actual power, and status among both male and female rugby league supporters. As society became less rigid in its adherence to regimented gender roles in the post-World War Two years, women like Rose Kyle and Kay Ibbetson were able to play leadership roles within clubs that would not have been possible previously. The meaningfulness of their experiences have only been rendered "quiet" due to their undocumented state. This thesis is proud to have given voice to these women's narratives, whose meaningfulness, having now been documented, can be seen to be remarkable.

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<sup>93</sup> Rebecca Solnit. 2015. 'The Mother of all Questions' in *Harper's Magazine*, October Issue, pp.5-7. Available: <http://harpers.org/archive/2015/10/the-mother-of-all-questions/>. [Accessed: 23 April, 2016].

Yet these individual success stories did little to change or undermine the tremendous weight of masculine dominance within the sport. Masculine control of rugby, and sport in general, has demonstrated tremendous plasticity and fluidity to maintain its grip. It has not been seriously challenged despite increasing numbers of women being involved in all capacities, as players, administrators and supporters. Rugby, in all its forms, is perceived and perceives itself as the most masculine of sports and, as this thesis has sought to demonstrate, defines itself as masculine and this necessarily means that women's participation has to take place within traditional gender boundaries. Those women who seek to participate outside of roles seen as supportive, nurturing or caring did (and do) not find a welcoming environment.

The research for this thesis has presented a number of problems. The most important of these was the paucity of primary source materials. Unlike cricket or rugby union, rugby league does not have an extensive literature or a large archival base. As a sport that is overwhelmingly working-class in composition, its history is largely orally-communicated, presenting major problems for historians of women. The official records of rugby league's governing body, the Rugby Football League, contain little information, apart from its annual *Official Guide* that lists the officials of all clubs in the game. Locating the names of women in the guides was searching the proverbial needle in a haystack. Fortunately, the digitisation of local newspapers over the past decade made the search for women in rugby league somewhat easier but, even with modern search technology, newspaper reports were at best sketchy and unsystematic. Moreover, it is quite likely

that women's contribution to the sport was overlooked or ignored by the exclusively male rugby league journalists. This therefore led to the use of oral histories and personal testimonies of female participants and their families to fill in some of the gaps in the story but also, just as importantly, to seek to understand the complexity and granularity of women's involvement in the game.

This mixed approach to the discovering and exploring source material has allowed the thesis to go beyond the traditional limitations of sports' history, with its focus on the playing of sport, and allowed the author to situate this research in the broader historiography of women and leisure. As well as building on the broader contextual "grand narrative" of Parratt's *More Than Mere Amusement* and extending its scope into the mid-twentieth century, the thesis has also confirmed in general the position of Langhammer's *Women's Leisure in England, 1920-60*, that women's involvement in leisure is shaped in large part by life-stage development, shifting in scope and utility over the course of a life time.

But this thesis is also a challenge. It is the result of a passionate concern to place on record the contributions and achievements of ordinary working-class women in a hyper-masculine sporting environment. Women have managed to not be a "morally corrupt" influence on the game; for over a century, women have been interested in the sport for more than just "the thighs". It is hoped that the sport of rugby league will now recognise the extraordinary work of women that have made the sport what it is and that the many women involved in the game will gain confidence from the experiences of the



women described within. And at an academic level, it is a challenge to the historians of other much more popular sports such as soccer, cricket and athletics to go beyond the boundary of the playing field to discover the rich and vital contribution that millions of women have made to all sports.

# Appendices

## Appendix 1: Invitation for Interview



### INVITATION FOR INTERVIEW

#### What We Are Doing:

The International Centre for Sports History and Culture, De Montfort University, Leicester is researching the history of women's involvement in the sport of Rugby League. The working title of the project is **Women and Rugby League: Gender, Class and Sport in the North of England, 1895-2010** and will examine the history of women's involvement in rugby league, as players, officials, administrators, supporters and unpaid labour.

#### Who We Are:

The primary researcher is Ms Victoria Dawson, a postgraduate student within the International Centre for Sports History and Culture. Her supervisor is Professor Tony Collins, the Director of the ICSHC. The project is being funded by The Arts and Humanities Research Council and The Rugby Football League, the governing body for the sport.

#### Who We Are:

We are seeking to interview women who worked within, or have an interest in rugby league in any capacity. We are also seeking to interview men who have had/have female relatives/friends working within or who have a strong interest in the sport. Interviews will last approximately 90 minutes, but may run longer with the Interviewee's consent should the need arise.

#### Example Topics Covered in the Interview:

- The Interviewee's role within rugby league.
- Whether the interviewee faced any difficulties within their role, on grounds of gender or other discrimination, or external factors.
- What makes rugby league attractive as a sport to the Interviewee.
- Other memories that the Interviewee may have in relation to their experience of rugby league.

#### There's Value in Participating:

The project aims to discover the history of women in the sport, analyse the reasons for women's historically restricted involvement and bring that history into the public sphere. Participants will be contributing their unique knowledge to this as yet unexplored area of history, and through the anticipated publication of this research will help to inform the general public of women's unacknowledged involvement in rugby league and highlight women's importance in helping the game grow and modernise since its inception in 1895.

#### How to Participate:

Prospective participants should consider whether they wish to contribute to the project, then complete and return the enclosed consent form in the envelope provided. Ms Dawson will then contact the Interviewee to arrange a date, time and location for the interview to take place. We encourage prospective participants to contact us directly with any further queries they may have by contacting Victoria Dawson on 07 or emailing Victoria @

## Appendix 2: Interviewee Information Sheet



### INTERVIEWEE INFORMATION SHEET

#### Confidentiality:

Your recorded interview will become part of the International Centre for Sports History and Culture's 'Women and Rugby League' archive, where it will be preserved as a permanent public reference resource for use in research, publication, education, lectures, broadcasting and the internet. You will only be identified in recordings and publications by your first name and your surname, unless you specify otherwise on the consent form. Any reference to geographic places in relation to your contribution will be kept to general place names, such as 'Hull' or 'Wigan'. All data relating to your specific contact details will be kept strictly confidential within the ICSHC and only be accessible to Ms Victoria Dawson and Professor Tony Collins. Such data will be kept for a maximum of five years after the completion of the project, after which time it will be destroyed.

#### Your Right to Withdraw:

You have the right to withdraw your interview from the archive at any point, by returning the form below to the following address:

Professor Tony Collins  
Director  
International Centre for Sports History and Culture  
De Montfort University  
The Gateway  
LEICESTER  
LE1 9BH

I hereby wish to withdraw my consent for my interview to be included in the Woman and Rugby League archive with immediate consent:

Name:	
Address:	
Signature:	
Date:	

## Appendix 3: Oral History Recording Agreement



### ORAL HISTORY RECORDING AGREEMENT

Your recorded interview will become part of the International Centre for Sports History and Culture's 'Women and Rugby League' project, where it will be preserved as a permanent public reference resource for use in research, publication, education, lectures, broadcasting and the internet. The purpose of this Agreement is to ensure that your contribution is added to the archives of the ICSHC in strict accordance with your wishes.

This Agreement is made between **De Montfort University of The Gateway, Leicester, LE1 9BH** ("the University") and **you** ("the Interviewee", "I"):

Your Name:	
Your Address	
In regard to the recorded interview/s that took place on the following date/s:	

**Declaration:** I, the Interviewee confirm that I consented to take part in the recording and hereby assign to the University all copyright in my contribution for use in all and any media. I understand that this will not affect my moral right to be identified as the 'performer' in accordance with the Copyright, Design and Patents Act 1988.

*If you do not wish to assign your copyright to the University, or you wish to limit public access to your contribution for a period of years, please state these conditions here:*

--

This Agreement will be governed by and construed in accordance with English law and the jurisdiction of the English courts.

Both parties shall, by signing below, indicate acceptance of the Agreement.

By or on behalf of <b>the Interviewee:</b>	For and on behalf of <b>the University:</b>
Signed:	
Print Name:	
Date:	

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## DVDs

*League of their Own II: Warriors Down Under*, directed by Rob Sloman [DVD], Lace International Ltd., 2007.

## Oral History Interviews

Beaumont, Nancy. Born 17 January 1931, lives Huddersfield. Former secretary, treasurer and chairperson of Huddersfield Supporters' Club.

Bullock, Mike. Born 18 January 1942, Hull. Played for East Hull Rugby League Football Club during Kay Ibbetson's time as secretary.

Burwell, Alan. Born: 15 December 1942, Hull. Professional rugby league player, played for East Hull Rugby League Football Club during Kay Ibbetson's time as secretary.

Clayton, Ian. Born 4 September 1959, Featherstone. Author and interviewer of Alice Brear.

Dunham, Julie. Born c.1960, Hull. Friend of Kay Ibbetson.

France, Patricia. Born 1936, Workington. Played rugby league in 1953.

Jardine, Ronnie. Born 7 March 1926, Workington. Former referee, involved in the women's games in Workington in 1953.

Kyle, Carole. Born 1939, Liverpool. Resides California, USA. Rose Muriel Kyle's daughter-in-law.

Laws, Dennis. Born 30 June 1927, Hull. Coach at East Hull Rugby League Football Club.

Laws, Lillian May. Born 23 April 1926, Hull. Wife of Dennis Laws.

Light (nee Bell), June. Born 26 March 1937, Workington. Played rugby league in 1953.

Matthews, Ann Jeanette (known as Jean). Born 1 September 1938, Workington. Played rugby league in 1953.

Parker, Alan. Born 1940, Hull. Played amateur rugby league and rugby union in his youth, referee for schools and amateur rugby league, held various positions with Hull and District Rugby League.

Tripp, Joseph John. Born 6 July 1940, Hull. Played for East Hull Rugby League Football Club during Kay Ibbetson's time as secretary.

Whitehead, Tom. Born c. 1937, lived Seaton. Several women family members played rugby league in 1953.

Wilson (née Windley), Alma. Born 18 November 1935, Workington. Played rugby league in 1953.